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## Handel's Performing Versions: A Study of Four Music Theatre Works from the 'Second Academy' Period

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*Handel's Performing Versions:  
A Study of Four Music Theatre Works  
from the 'Second Academy' Period*

Volume 1

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# Volume 2 restricted access

David Vickers  
**Handel's Performing Versions:**  
A Study of Four Music Theatre Works from the 'Second Academy' Period

**Abstract**

The dissertation is a reconstruction and evaluation of the different versions of Handel's operas *Partenope* and *Arianna*, and his oratorios *Esther* and *Deborah*, as composed and as performed under his direction. The first public performances of all four works were given at the King's Theatre in London during the early 1730s, a period commonly described as 'The Second Academy' (1729-34). Chapter 1 examines the organization of the Second Academy, surveys Handel's opera seasons between 1729 and 1737, and presents hypotheses about the composer's artistic planning during a period of unparalleled independence. This establishes the context for the first public performances of *Partenope*, *Arianna in Creta*, *Esther* and *Deborah* within Handel's career, and outlines his contemporary revivals of these music dramas. Chapters 2-5 present the four case studies in chronological order of their first performances: each chapter contains an investigation of the work's sources, observations about Handel's compositional process, and descriptions of each performing version prepared under his direction (including those made for Oxford and Dublin).

Chapter 6 assesses the composer's alterations to both the music and the libretto texts of the four works between the first performance of *Partenope* in 1730 and his last revival of *Esther* in 1757 (two years before his death). Using examples drawn from all of his versions of the four case studies, the musico-dramatic impact and artistic significance of his revisions are discussed. There is a long-standing assumption that Handel ruined his own music dramas when revising them for revivals: the dissertation takes the unhindered view of Handel's working methods and creative personality across a remarkable span of his working life (1730-57), and presents evidence that all versions need critical consideration.



# Handel's Performing Versions:

## A Study of Four Music Theatre Works from the 'Second Academy' Period

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## Foreword

The support of many scholars has considerably enhanced this thesis. I thank Graydon Beeks, Ilias Chrissochoidis, Hans Dieter Clausen, Graham Cummings, Annette Landgraf, Lowell Lindgren, Suzana Ograjenšek, John Roberts, Leslie Robarts, Thomas McGeary and Colin Timms for their advice. Winton Dean kindly allowed me to read an early draft typescript for his chapter about *Partenope* included in his newly published book *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*. Dr Dean was also kind enough to spare me some time to informally discuss *Arianna in Creta*. Ellen Harris provided unpublished typescripts from the late John Merrill Knapp's independent draft of *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*. Sarah McCleave shared useful information and ideas about Handel's working relationship with the dancer Marie Sallé. My summary of Handel's concert series at Oxford in the summer of 1733 was guided by recent research generously shared by H. Diack Johnstone.

I am particularly grateful to Anthony Hicks for providing a facsimile of Stampiglia's *La Partenope* (Venice, 1707), sharing his performance edition of the 1732 version of *Esther* prepared for the 2002 London Handel Festival, and making constructive comments regarding several small details within the scope of this thesis. Reinhard Strohm, Lorenzo Bianconi, and Stefan Brandt helped me gain a better understanding of Pariati's source libretto for *Arianna in Creta*. Conversations with Ruth Smith about Samuel Humphreys' additions to the 1732 libretto of *Esther* produced useful ideas. I particularly thank John Greenacombe for alerting me to the possibility that American libraries might hold several printed wordbooks of *Esther* and *Deborah* previously unknown to Handel scholars. Mark Risinger kindly assisted my inspection of an edition of the *Deborah* libretto the Berg Collection at New York Public Library.

The appendices of this thesis contain collations of libretto texts used in each of Handel's versions of *Partenope* and *Arianna in Creta*. In each case I decided not to modernize the Italian texts, but have instead attempted to reproduce the style of the



original publications. However, some the grossest errors in the original wordbooks have been corrected. I have endeavoured to present libretto texts of what I believe Handel performed, which is not always literally identical to what was printed and sold to his audience.<sup>1</sup> The benefit of having each libretto relating to Handel's own performances of these four works in large parallel tables is clear to anybody wishing to quickly determine the variants between editions. The appendices contain Italian texts that I have translated into English, and I am grateful to Flavio Benedetti Guidelli and Carlo Vitali for their spontaneous and enthusiastic correction of my early attempts.

I am grateful to staff at the British Library and the Royal College of Music Library (London), the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the Fitzwilliam Museum and King's College Library (Cambridge), Hampshire Record Office (Winchester), the Henry Watson Music Library (Manchester Central Library), Princeton University Library, New York Public Library, the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris) and the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Carl von Ossietzky (Hamburg). I am especially grateful to the Gerald Coke Handel Foundation, which was generous with its financial sponsorship of my work and with access to the catalogue and contents of the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, especially when the collection was in storage at the Hampshire Record Office in Winchester. I also thank Katherine Hogg and the staff of the Coke Collection at its new home at the Foundling Museum. The support of David Rowland, and the Open University Research School, has been valuable.

This thesis would not have been possible without the supportive counsel and patience of my supervisors Professor Donald Burrows and Dr Terence Best, who have proved to be outstanding teachers and generous Handelian friends. I am particularly indebted to my family. My father offered vital support of many kinds. My wife Alex, and

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<sup>1</sup> I have employed a similar policy in the libretto collations of *Esther* and *Deborah*, but due to the complexity of the sources I decided to present libretto texts as published, and discuss contradictions and corrections in my reconstructions.

our four children, made far too many sacrifices so that I could follow my obsession; I owe them a heartfelt apology and a long overdue holiday without Handel.

## Guidance On Using This Thesis

Each of the four case studies (Chapters 2-5) has an individual appendix in Volume 2, with both the case study (the chapter in Volume 1) and its appendices (in Volume 2) sharing the same number. These appendices present documentation necessary to support the discussion contained in Volume 1, and it is recommended that the two volumes be examined in conjunction with each other. Appendix 1a corresponds with the discussion of Handel's seasons between 1729 and 1737 in Chapter 1. Appendix 1b outlines Handel's calendar of performances during the 1740s and 1750s relevant to revivals of *Esther* and *Deborah*, which are discussed in the appropriate chapters.

In order to maximize benefit from using this thesis, the reader should consult *HG* and *HHA* for music examples (references listed in Appendix 6), except in instances where unpublished music is included in the relevant appendix of this thesis. Within the main text of the thesis, music examples are used only to illustrate details not available in printed sources. Music manuscripts with shelf-marks commencing 'RM' are all in the British Library (London), those with 'Cfm' are in the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), and those with M A/ or M C/ are in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Carl von Ossietzky (Hamburg). Throughout the thesis I have adopted the customary use of the term 'conducting score' to describe music manuscripts apparently made for Handel's use in performances, notwithstanding the misleading issues that arise from use of this term: it is difficult to imagine that such bulky manuscripts were perched on Handel's harpsichord.

I have adhered to the short method of specifying the location of material within an opera or oratorio (e.g. Rosmira's hunting aria 'Io seguo sol fiero' in *Partenope* is in I.xiii, not 'Act I scene 13'), but please note that in discussions of Handel's revivals scene numbering may be different from the original version. When clarification is necessary, adjusted scene-numbers for revivals are indicated. On occasions when Handel revived the same work at two different times during the same calendar year, the respective versions are

distinguished as ‘a’ and ‘b’ (e.g. the first run of *Deborah* in London is ‘1733a’, but the revival at Oxford a few months later is ‘1733b’).

## List of Abbreviations

### **Books**

*Deutsch*      Otto Erich Deutsch: *Handel: A Documentary Biography*.

### **Catalogues**

*HHB*      Bernd Baselt: ‘Verzeichnis der Werke Georg Friedrich Händels’ (HWV catalogue) in *Händel-Handbuch*, volumes 1-3

### **Collected editions**

*HG*      *Deutsche Händel Gesellschaft* (ed. F. Chrysander)

*HHA*      *Hallische Händel Ausgabe*

### **Journals**

*EM*      *Early Music*

*GHB*      *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge*

*HJb*      *Händel-Jahrbuch*

*ML*      *Music & Letters*

*MT*      *Musical Times*

*NG*      *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2001

*NG Opera*      *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*



# Chapter 1

## *Handel's Seasons*

### Introduction

The dissertation is a reconstruction and evaluation of the different versions of Handel's operas *Partenope* and *Arianna*, and his oratorios *Esther* and *Deborah*, as composed and as performed under his direction. The first public performances of all four works were given at the King's Theatre in London during the early 1730s, a period commonly described as 'The Second Academy' (1729-34). Chapter 1 examines the organization of the Second Academy, surveys Handel's opera seasons between 1729 and 1737, and presents hypotheses about the composer's artistic planning during a period of unparalleled independence. This establishes the context for the first public performances of *Partenope*, *Arianna in Creta*, *Esther* and *Deborah* within Handel's career, and outlines his contemporary revivals of these music dramas. Chapters 2-5 present the four case studies in chronological order of their first performances: each chapter contains an investigation of the work's sources, observations about Handel's compositional process, and descriptions of each performing version prepared under his direction (including those made for Oxford and Dublin).<sup>2</sup> Chapter 6 assesses the composer's alterations to both the music and the libretto texts of the four works between the first performance of *Partenope* in 1730 and his last revival of *Esther* in 1757 (two years before his death). Using examples drawn from all of his versions of the four case studies, the musico-dramatic impact and artistic significance of his revisions are discussed.

There is a long-standing assumption that Handel ruined his own music dramas when revising them for revivals, but the composer's own thoughts about musico-dramatic elements in his works are unknown. He left few letters, none of which contain any

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<sup>2</sup> Handel's first version of *Esther* - that Chrysander titled *Haman and Mordecai* - was probably first performed in private at Cannons (c.1718-19), and is outside the scope of this thesis. Also, other eighteenth-century performances of these works not directed by Handel are not included (for example, oratorio performances in Oxford directed by William Hayes, or opera performances in Hamburg during the 1730s directed by Keiser or Telemann).



observations about musico-dramatic ideals. It has been suggested that 'Handel would have been the last composer to formulate his aesthetic aims, and it is doubtful if he ever thought further ahead than the provision of the best possible musical entertainment with the forces at his disposal',<sup>3</sup> but the emotional richness and remarkable diversity of his theatre works imply that dramatic representation of characters, incidents and moral allegories were important to him. It is perhaps overlooked that he did not compose music only in order to display the vocal abilities of his singers, but that he sought to display his own talent as a composer of theatre music. Anecdotal evidence suggests that he was not prepared to sacrifice dramatic concerns to flatter the ego of Cuzzoni when rehearsing *Ottone* in 1723,<sup>4</sup> nor that of Carestini when preparing *Alcina* in 1735.<sup>5</sup> Both star singers apparently refused to sing simple arias until Handel insisted on getting his own way. The composer was presumably convinced that his musical choices had dramatic integrity, and it is significant that he was not willing to compromise in these two instances.

Modern scholars, critics and music-lovers might cynically assume that London audiences were less interested in the dramatic quality of operas and oratorios than the novelty of new exotic singers during the early eighteenth century, or that the aristocracy only attended the opera in order to follow the whim of fashionable society. Only a few eyewitness accounts of Handel's performances are known, and most describe whether or not singers were popular rather than the representation of dramatic ideas, but the publication of an essay about moral allegory in *Alcina* in *The Universal Spectator* on 5 July 1735 suggests that at least some of the London public were keenly interested in experiencing his performances as serious dramas worthy of criticism and praise.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, it is clear that some in the audience were astute critics of how Handel used singers in his revivals. After attending *Deborah* on 3 November 1744, the Earl of Radnor wrote to James Harris that the soprano Francesina was 'wel received, but I really

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<sup>3</sup> Winton Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> John Mainwaring: *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel*, p. 110 (fn).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Burney: 'Sketch of the Life of Handel', p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Deutsch* pp. 391-2.

think neither she or Mrs Cybber whear any think like to what they have done formerly, when parts where made on purpose for them.’<sup>7</sup> It seems that the composer’s circle of friends were aware that fitting new singers to old roles was a problematic aspect of his performances, and that he contrived to present singers to their fullest advantage in new works tailor-made for their acting and singing abilities. After attending a revival of *Saul* in 1750 George Harris wrote to Elizabeth Harris:

if one may be allowed to criticize, the songs didn’t seem well adapted to his voices, nor was the performance then so accurate as usual ... Handel I believe has never had a better set of voices for his oratorio; & when he brings on his new piece, where no doubt he’ll contrive to have ’em all appear to advantage, I dare say he’ll meet with success.<sup>8</sup>

Winton Dean wrote in 1959 that Handel’s revisions for revivals ‘have no aesthetic motive’.<sup>9</sup> Whilst noting that ‘some ... minor revisions may be claimed as improvements’, Dean made the generalization that ‘major excisions and insertions’ dislocated the plot and musical design of the composer’s theatre works. Dean judged that Handel’s reshaping of scenes was ‘without exception calamitous’ and reduced some ‘masterpieces to arrant nonsense’:

Clearly he could not recapture the original mood, if he even tried. He had lost that sense of context that was one of his supreme gifts, and he does not seem to have cared: he made little or no attempt to produce a convincing whole. ... It was not simply the relaxation of old age, for the process began with the first oratorio revivals, and parallels can be found in the operas. [...] Probably the basic explanation is that Handel hoped to sweeten the appreciation of his audience by

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<sup>7</sup> Letter dated 6 November 1744 (Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill: *Music and Theatre in Handel’s World: The Family Papers of James Harris 1732-1780*, p. 204). Ten months earlier, Thomas Harris wrote that he feared a revival of *Samson* would ‘not go off so well as when Mrs Cibber performed her part in it.’ (Letter to James Harris, dated 26 February 1744, *Ibid.*, p. 184).

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated 8 March 1750 (*Ibid.*, p. 266).

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 92-3.

keeping them supplied with some new thing. ... What is quite certain is that, while he took endless trouble over the composition of each oratorio, as soon as the creative ardour had cooled he did not mind what indignity he practised upon it; and this tendency increased as he grew older.<sup>10</sup>

Dean's words were expressed in a tone of unshakeable certainty,<sup>11</sup> and imply several things to a trusting reader: 1) Handel was never aesthetically motivated in his revisions of old works; 2) Small revisions might have been improvements, but that is doubtful; big alterations always ruined works; 3) The composer's revivals of his own work were without exception calamitous, with their dramatic qualities reduced to arrant nonsense; 4) Handel was incapable of reproducing the inspiration of the compositional act when working with old music, but did not really care about this deficiency; 5) His performing versions of a theatre work made after the first run of performances were not convincingly 'whole'; 6) Opera revivals suffered from the same malady, so he therefore ruined his own work throughout his entire career in all genres; 7) Handel's alterations were merely done to offer his audience superficial novelty; 8) The composer did not mind his self-destructive treatment of work, which got worse as he got older.

All eight impressions, if understood as generalizations applying to all of Handel's revisions, are unreliable overstatements, and are substantially incorrect: he could have been aesthetically motivated for some of his revisions; both small and large alterations alike could improve the dramatic aspects of his work; his revivals were frequently sensible and preserved the dramatic core of the original work; he obviously took notable care over preparing new music for insertion; few insertions were made purely for novelty value, and these patterns are common in both opera and oratorio throughout his career.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, Dean's opinions on many aspects of Handel's music dramas have changed since 1959. In 1988, Dean noted that 'Inevitably much new information has come to light ... In addition my estimate of Handel's Italian operas has been transformed ... The pages dealing with them ... now seem to me wanting in judgment.' (Preface to the paperback edition, Ibid.).



However, Dean's description influenced several popular biographies of Handel.<sup>12</sup> A notable example is Paul Henry Lang's 1966 book, which essentially repeated Dean's sentiment, albeit from a more forgiving stance:

there were blemishes, too, in Handel's character [...] he could do shoddy work.

When creative fervour dropped, he was an ordinary mortal, and we should look at his lapses with sympathy, as we do with other great men whose accomplishments dwarf their shortcomings. But there is one aspect of these weaknesses that cannot be passed over lightly [...] Implicit in all his original scores is the craftsman's jealous fidelity to the shape and substance of the material with which he works. But once the task was finished, he showed an incredible indifference, and more often than not simply ruined his carefully planned and lovingly composed work with senseless juggling of portions, transpositions, cuts, emendations, and interpolations of all sorts. Almost every one of his major scores became, after a few revivals, a jungle in which the traveller can hardly find his way. It is incomprehensible how this sensitive man of impeccable taste would throw together odds and ends without any regard to compatibility.<sup>13</sup>

Lang seems to imply that we can forgive Handel for a multitude of sins, but not for the ways in which he revised his masterpieces. Such points of view infer that the composer's first versions of theatre works are 'definitive', but these assumptions have become increasingly questioned and challenged by scholars. In 1984, Watkins Shaw reasonably observed that 'Every creator of a work of art must be allowed his revisions, and, where these exist, it is bogus scholarship to give preference over them to the original version *for*

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<sup>12</sup> Over quarter of a century after Dean's book was first published, Jonathan Keates remarked: 'One of the least explicable aspects of Handel's creative outlook is his cavalier attitude towards his works ... [several] were seriously affected by his additions and subtractions' (*Handel: The Man and his Music*, p. 159). More recently, Christopher Hogwood opined that the composer was 'an inveterate borrower of musical ideas, who, like Mendelssohn after him, suffered from "Revisionskrankheit" – a chronic need to revise and rewrite his own [music]'. (Booklet essay for commercial CD recording *The Secret Handel*, Metronome, METCD1060, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> *George Frideric Handel*, pp. 556-8.

*no other reason than that the original came first.*'<sup>14</sup> The dissertation takes the unhindered view of the composer's working methods and creative personality across a remarkable span of his working life (1730-57), and presents evidence that all versions need critical consideration.

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<sup>14</sup> Preface to *Theodora*, Novello, p. v.

## Part One: The Second Academy

### The collapse of the Royal Academy of Music

The apocryphal label ‘Second Academy’<sup>15</sup> describes Handel’s operatic activities at the Kings’ Theatre, Haymarket from December 1729 until summer 1734, after which the recently formed rival company the ‘Opera of the Nobility’<sup>16</sup> took over at the King’s Theatre.<sup>17</sup> The four case studies discussed in Chapters 2-5 were all first performed publicly by the so-called ‘Second Academy’. To understand the context and characteristics of the Second Academy phase of Handel’s career, it is necessary to evaluate the achievements and apparent collapse of the Royal Academy of Music (April 1720 – June 1728), which was ‘founded to establish regular seasons of Italian opera in London. When, after nine seasons, it closed its doors, it had succeeded in setting higher standards of artistic taste and production’.<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Gibson judged:

This was not mere chance but was the fruit of a conscious effort on the part of its supporters to create an opera worthy of London, a city transformed by a period of vast economic growth. The formation of the Academy was made possible by a group of wealthy aristocrats who were prepared to underwrite the high subscription.

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<sup>15</sup> The description ‘Second Academy’ does not originate in contemporary sources, and seems to be an invention by twentieth-century biographers and scholars. The earliest source I have inspected which specifically uses the exact phrase ‘Second Academy’ is *Deutsch*, p. 248. It was also used by Paul Henry Lang (*Handel*, 1966), but is not used in earlier biographies by Mainwaring, Coxe, Schoelcher, Flower, and Dent. Streatfield referred to the company as the ‘New Academy’ (*Handel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1910), perhaps following a description set by Chrysander in his biography of Handel published in 1860 (‘neue Opernakademie’, p. 221). The term ‘Second Academy’ was used by Winton Dean in *Handel and the Opera Seria*, and also in *NG* (1980 edition; reprinted as *The New Grove Handel* in 1983); it has been retained by Anthony Hicks in the latest edition of *NG* (2001). The description ‘Second Academy’ is retained here as a convenient title for this distinctive period of Handel’s career.

<sup>16</sup> The name ‘Opera of the Nobility’ is retained here for convenience, but it is not entirely apocryphal because something close to this title was used in the company’s printed word-books during the mid-1730s.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible to argue that the Italian opera company at the King’s Theatre was publicly perceived as ‘The Royal Academy of Music’ whoever the performers and composers were. Many among London’s opera audience would have perceived the ‘Opera of the Nobility’ - featuring Senesino and several of Handel’s former singers - as the natural successors to the ‘Royal Academy of Music’ rather than Handel’s independent enterprises at Covent Garden between 1734 and 1737. From a certain point of view, the ‘Opera of the Nobility’ became the ‘Third Academy’ when it moved into the King’s Theatre. However, Suzana Ograjenšek described that the events of 1728 ‘marks a very clear-cut break in the way it operated’ (‘From *Alessandro* (1726) to *Tolomeo* (1728): The Final Royal Academy Operas’, p. 10).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Gibson: *The Royal Academy of Music 1719-1728: The Institution and Its Directors*, p. 285.



Most of them had spent a good deal of time abroad - either on the Grand Tour, in a diplomatic capacity, or on service ... Many had travelled extensively in Italy and visited other centres of Italianate opera such as Hamburg and Dresden; and they wanted to recreate in London the luxurious and prestigious art-form they had come to admire.

The Academy endeavoured to 'institute a type of heroic opera ... [that] was drawn from the classical and historical stock which was the staple diet of a gentleman's education and was intended to illuminate how the great should behave; on the whole, highly serious and exemplary stories'. Gibson suggested that 'the Royal Academy of Music productions achieved real value in terms of dignity and decorum, with music that was different, at least in subject matter, from the magical, pastoral and tragi-comic themes of the operas of the previous and following decades.'<sup>19</sup> But if the Academy was an artistic success, it seems that its management could not be sustained. The company struggled in its last few seasons owing to financial mismanagement and internal squabbling.<sup>20</sup> By 25 November 1727 there were enough problems to cause Mrs. Pendarves, one of Handel's staunchest supporters, to reveal pessimism:

I doubt operas will not survive longer than this winter, they are now at their last gasp; the subscription is expired and nobody will renew it. The directors ... have so many divisions among themselves that I wonder they have not broke up before; Senesino goes away next winter, and I believe Faustina, so you see harmony is almost out of fashion.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., pp. 285-9.

<sup>20</sup> Summarised by Winton Dean in *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 218.

At the end of the 1727-8 season the Academy's principal singers returned to the continent, evidently pursuing careers without any discernible intention of returning to London.<sup>22</sup> On 16 May 1728 the *Daily Courant* advertised a meeting of the Royal Academy of Music on 22 May in which members were invited to offer proposals 'for carrying on the operas'.<sup>23</sup> This meeting was not conclusive because a further meeting was held on 5 June to decide 'how the Scenes, Cloaths, &c., are to be disposed of, if the Operas cannot be continued.'<sup>24</sup> Some remained optimistic that the Academy could feasibly continue the following season: in mid-June 1728 John Jacob Heidegger, the manager of the King's Theatre, departed for Italy to attempt to recruit singers.<sup>25</sup> On 29 October 1728 the *London Evening Post* reported that 'Senesino, Faustina, and other Italian Singers have engaged to return to this Kingdom very speedily',<sup>26</sup> but this story was false. Heidegger failed to engage suitable performers.<sup>27</sup> Despite hopes that the Academy would continue producing Italian operas in London, the proposed 1728-9 season was eventually abandoned. This caused the apparent demise of the Royal Academy of Music.<sup>28</sup> Its collapse was not solely instigated by financial problems:<sup>29</sup>

When the company closed its doors in June 1728 there was no immediate plan to discontinue the venture. Subscriptions were taken in for the following season and

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<sup>22</sup> The alto castrato Senesino and soprano Faustina next performed in Turin and Venice. The soprano Cuzzoni went to Vienna (Donald Burrows: *Handel*, 1994, p. 126). Suzana Ograjenšek summarized that 'Before the end of the 1727-1728 season it had become clear that future productions of Italian opera in London would need to be based on different foundations. The Academy was struggling financially and was not paying the performers on time. It is recorded that in October 1727 the Academy still owed Bordoni a portion of her fee for the previous season; she threatened to leave the company and so did Senesino. As a result, early on in the season all the principal singers had found themselves engagements on the continent for the following year.' (Op. cit., p. 24).

<sup>23</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 226.

<sup>24</sup> Advertisement in the *London Gazette*, 1 June 1728 (Gibson: Op. cit., p. 278). *Deutsch*, following Burney, attributed this newspaper report to the *Daily Courant*, 31 May 1728 (p. 226).

<sup>25</sup> Reports verifying Heidegger's trip appear in the *London Evening Post* on 15 June 1728 and in *The Craftsman* on 22 June 1728 (Gibson: Op. cit., p. 278).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger's return to London was reported in the *London Evening Post* on 7 November 1728, but Baron Cadogan wrote to the Duke of Richmond on 1 October that 'Heideghar is return'd from Italy and says, he can engage the same Singers we had, for next year; but that nothing of that Kind can be this Season.' (*Ibid.*).

<sup>28</sup> It seems that the Academy members instead decided to produce a subscription concert series, and allowed Heidegger to continue holding Masquerades at the King's Theatre. However, Gibson noted that 'If the proposed series of concerts to be held during the season actually took place, they were not advertised in the London newspapers.' (*Ibid.*, pp. 280-1). We cannot assume that 'Academy' concerts took place during the 1728-9 season, although it was advertised that several of Heidegger's masquerades featured instrumental music from Handel's operas.

<sup>29</sup> An undated list shows that 35 patrons were willing to subscribe to a season commencing in October 1728 (*Ibid.*, pp. 278-9).



elections for directors held. The subscribers were finally forced to abandon the idea of a season of operas in 1728-29 not by a shortage of capital (both Handel and Heidegger had assured Swiney that funds were available) but by a lack of singers, all of whom had travelled to the Continent during the summer of 1728 and were reluctant to return.<sup>30</sup>

### **The establishment of the 'Second Academy'**

On 18 January 1729 Lord Percival (later Earl of Egmont) wrote in his diary '[I] went to a meeting of the members of the Royal Academy of Musick: where we agreed to ... permit Hydeger and Hendle to carry on operas without disturbance for 5 years and to lend them for that time our scenes, machines, clothes, instruments, furniture, etc. It all past off in a great hurry, and there was not above 20 there.'<sup>31</sup> Percival's comment 'without disturbance' probably meant that the King's Theatre and facilities, which legally remained the property of The Royal Academy of Music, were to be available to Handel and Heidegger for a guaranteed five years without interruption. Significantly, the aristocratic directors of Royal Academy of Music also abstained from causing 'disturbance' by apparently disengaging from direct involvement in artistic matters. An entertaining account of this decisive - and possibly last - meeting of the Royal Academy of Music meeting is contained in a letter written to Senesino in Venice by Paolo Rolli on 25 January 1729:<sup>32</sup>

Heydeger returned and said that he had not found any singers in Italy; he protested that he did not wish to undertake anything without the two ladies [i.e. Cuzzoni and Faustina]; ... He was thinking more of a lucrative subscription than of anything else and he was calculating well, ... But Handel was not to be duped by such a paltry stratagem. He revealed his rival's rascally deceit: the only aim of his useless and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>32</sup> Rolli was Italian Secretary to the Royal Academy of Music during 1720-22, and adapted the librettos of *Muzio Scevola*, *Floridante*, *Siroe*, *Alessandro*, and *Riccardo Primo* for Handel during the 1720s. It was at one time suggested that Rolli prepared *Sosarme* (1732), but it is unlikely that Rolli collaborated with Handel during the 1730s.

ridiculous voyage was to profit himself alone. So [Handel] declared that there was need of a change and has renewed the old system of changing the singers in order to have the opportunity of composing new works for new performers. His new plans find favour at Court and he is satisfied ... Mylord Bingley is at the head of the project, but the theatre has still to be found [i.e. paid for]. So they called in Hydeger and they have granted him 2200 pounds with which to provide the theatre, the scenery, and the costumes. Handel will have 1000 pounds for the composition, whether it will be by himself or by whomsoever else he may choose. ... A total of 4000 pounds is proposed for the singers - two at a 1000 pounds each with a benefit performance, and the rest, etc. Handel will shortly depart for Italy, where he will select the cast. Three representatives of the subscribers will go with him, in order to examine them, etc. That is the new system.<sup>33</sup>

Rolli's correspondence to Italian colleagues was frequently littered with sarcastic references to Handel and malicious gossip about operatic politics. His report to the comparably prejudiced Senesino cannot be accepted as neutral objective information, but it contains six intriguing suggestions:

1. Heidegger had not expended much effort during his trip to Italy to secure new singers for the Academy. The impresario wanted to re-engage singers who had already sung in London, and additionally the celebrated castrato Farinelli, but quickly gave up when this plan failed.
2. Handel was unimpressed by Heidegger's lacklustre efforts, and took control of the meeting: He proposed a plan to create new operas for new singers. This plan was supported by the Royal Family.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>34</sup> Dean claims that 'the enterprise was under the patronage of the Princess Royal, Anne, the eldest daughter of George II.' (*Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 125). However, there is no clear evidence of this.

3. Handel decided to visit Italy to choose singers himself, assisted by three representatives of the subscribers.
4. Lord Bingley was, at least at this stage, perceived as the 'head of the project'.<sup>35</sup>
5. Heidegger was granted 2200 pounds to provide the physical facilities required.
6. Handel was to be paid a flat fee of 1000 pounds for providing the operas, whether or not they were his own compositions. This fee matched the amount the new prima donna and *primo uomo* would be offered, although they would also receive stipends from benefit performances.

In their analysis of the Royal Charter made for the Royal Academy of Music in 1719, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume discussed a verbatim copy made in June 1728: 'Why a copy was made and entered in a government office in June 1728 we do not know. We may speculate that it had to do with an attempt to reconstitute the company or to transfer its operating authority to Handel and Heidegger.'<sup>36</sup> Winton Dean proposed that all the evidence suggests that there was 'a binding contract between the Academy on the one part and Handel and Heidegger on the other ... though no such document has been discovered',<sup>37</sup> but described Handel's determination to continue with Italian operas in London during the 1730s as 'obstinate reluctance ... after it had repeatedly failed with the public'.<sup>38</sup> Donald Burrows observed that 'it is difficult to make sense of the relationship between Handel, Heidegger and the continuing institution of the Royal Academy',<sup>39</sup> but concluded that they had come to an arrangement:

Heidegger was the manager of the theatre, and as such responsible for the activities that took place in the building: he was obviously beholden to the Academy when it came to the performance of operas (usually two nights a week during the season,

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<sup>35</sup> This arrangement was short-term: Bingley died in 1731 (Ibid.).

<sup>36</sup> Milhous & Hume: 'The Charter for the Royal Academy of Music', pp. 57-8.

<sup>37</sup> Op. cit., p. 125.

<sup>38</sup> *The New Grove Handel*, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> *Handel*, p. 127.



and rehearsals as necessary) ... It might have been possible for Handel to lease the theatre from Heidegger for his own opera performances, but it seems that they agreed to proceed as co-managers in 1728, and that both were involved with the acquisition and contracting of performers.<sup>40</sup>

Ellen Harris proposed that Handel could have remained under obligation to the charter of the Royal Academy of Music, and that his subsequent operatic ventures, even after 1729, might have been 'fulfilling a real or assumed responsibility'. Harris observed that 'the Royal Academy of Music, which was chartered to last for twenty-one years premiered its first opera on 2 April 1720 and that Handel's last opera [*Deidamia*] premiered in London on 10 January 1741, twenty-one years later. This may not be a coincidence.'<sup>41</sup>

Robert D. Hume's analysis of the alleged events in January 1729 leads to his observation that 'neither Bingley nor any other 'director' is mentioned in newspapers or letters of the next few years, and two much later sources speak as though Handel and Heidegger were the sole proprietors of the new opera company.'<sup>42</sup> Hume compared anecdotal reports by John Mainwaring, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Charles Burney, and Sir John Hawkins, and concluded that there are 'at least three contradictory notions of the Second Academy management':<sup>43</sup> 1) Handel and Heidegger organised an opera company at their joint risk for a term of either three or five years, and put up the capital themselves to support the venture; 2) Handel and Heidegger served as managers for a group of private proprietors headed by Lord Bingley, and each received a flat annual fee; 3) Handel and

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<sup>40</sup> Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s: Venues, Programmes, Patronage and Performers' in *GHB X*, pp. 150-1.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen T. Harris: *The Librettos of Handel's Operas: A Collection of Seventy-One Librettos Documenting Handel's Operatic Career*, Vol. 6, p. ix. Harris proposes that the Royal Academy of Music did not dissolve, but that Handel's activities in the 1730s are most satisfactorily explained as a less formal continuation of it. If so, this potentially means that Handel was obliged to continue providing operas until 1741. It might also explain why he consistently refused invitations to compose operas after that date.

<sup>42</sup> Hume: 'Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', pp. 347-50.

<sup>43</sup> I have abridged these three notions from Hume's extensive discussion. Hume's study of the Handel-Heidegger opera company concludes that 'In truth, it is simply not known how their partnership worked or who underwrote the finances' (Ibid., p. 350).

Heidegger operated together as an independent management but with financial guarantees from private patrons, of whom some ultimately defected or ‘welshed’.

Notwithstanding ambiguity about the management structure agreed at the Royal Academy’s last official meeting on 18 January 1729, one assumes that Handel gained a substantial increase in artistic independence. He promptly asserted control: contemporary newspaper reports claim that Handel departed for Italy within 10 days,<sup>44</sup> although it is possible he set off slightly later, on 4 February 1729, when Rolli wrote to Senesino:

The new Handeleidegriano [i.e. Handel-Heidegger] system is gaining ground. A general meeting was held, at which it was discussed. There were few present and only six or seven of these subscribed; others did not refuse to do so, and others requested that they should first be notified who the singers were. The Royal wishes on this matter were made known and it was announced that Handel would soon leave for Italy in search of singers. By unanimous consent the two managers were granted the use of the Academy’s dresses and scenery for five years. Handel is in fact departing today, and ten days ago Haym despatched circular letters to the professional singers in Italy, announcing this new project and Handel’s arrival.<sup>45</sup>

By 11 March 1729 Handel had arrived in Venice, where he was probably based during his extended visit.<sup>46</sup> His first priority was to engage Farinelli, although the castrato was not interested. A year later, the Venetian-based Colonel Burges wrote to the Duke of Newcastle that ‘when Mr. Hendel was here last winter, Farinello would never see him in

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<sup>44</sup> The *Daily Post* on 27 January 1729 reported that ‘Yesterday Morning Mr. Handell, the famous Composer of the Italian Musick, took his Leave of their Majesties, he being set out this Day for Italy, with a Commission from the Royal Academy of Musick’ (*Deutsch*, p. 236). However, the exact date of Handel’s departure is unknown because on 28 January 1729 the *London Evening Post* reported he was to set out that day (i.e. a day later than the *Daily Post* had claimed) ‘with a Commission from the Royal Academy of Musick’ to hire singers (Gibson: Op. cit., p. 281).

<sup>45</sup> Taken from Burrows (Op. cit., p. 128), but also in *Deutsch*, pp. 236-8. Rolli clearly delighted in meddling with operatic politics, telling Senesino that Faustina was out of favour with George II, and that Handel ‘hated’ Cuzzoni. If so, it was obvious that Handel would not attempt to re-engage either of his former prima donnas if he could find a preferable alternative.

<sup>46</sup> Burrows: Ibid., p. 129. On 11 March Handel wrote to his brother-in-law Michaelsen in Halle, requesting that correspondence should be addressed to ‘Mr. Joseph Smith, Banker, at Venice ... who will send them on to me at the various places in Italy where I shall be’ (*Deutsch*, pp. 239-40).



particular, or ever return'd him a visit, tho' Mr Hendel was three times at his door to wait on him.'<sup>47</sup> Faustina and Senesino were also in Venice, but it is doubtful that Handel actively sought their return: he seems to have been determined to create an entirely new company. Handel's visits to Bologna, Rome, and Naples were motivated by the urgent need to secure enough singers in time for the 1729-30 London season.<sup>48</sup> At Bologna in March 1729 Handel met Owen Swiney, who reported to the Duke of Richmond:

Handel sett out, yesterday Morning for Rome. Tho' His Journey was something late for forming a company, fit for London next year, yet by Bernachi's, Carestini's & ye. Merigihi's discharge from their Engagement at Naples, he'l have a good chance, of making a Very good one. He tells me that He has Engaged one Madame Somis, of Turin ... He has, likewise, Engaged Signor Annibale Fabris (a Tenour) who, I formerly, recommended to ye. Service of ye. academy.<sup>49</sup>

Handel probably hired the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri at Bologna. Little is known about Handel's visit to Rome,<sup>50</sup> although that city was the home of the contralto Francesca Bertolli. It seems that she had not sung in any engagements that season, which led Reinhard Strohm to speculate that 'Handel probably met her personally, as it was her appearance rather than her voice or her acting that would explain her being engaged for London.'<sup>51</sup> Handel's alleged visit to Naples was particularly profitable, as it probably resulted in direct contact with the three singers cited by Swiney, and additionally the soprano Strada, who was in Naples with her husband the theatre architect Aurelio del Pò.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Letter of 9/20 January 1730 (Gibson: Op. cit., pp. 282-3).

<sup>48</sup> Perhaps Handel visited Turin, Florence, Milan, and Parma, but no documentary evidence is known.

<sup>49</sup> Letter dated 19/30 March 1729 (Ibid., p. 282). Handel probably took advantage of Swiney's knowledge and network of contacts while passing through Bologna.

<sup>50</sup> Mainwaring claimed that in Rome Handel received an invitation and gift from his former patron Cardinal Colonna. Apparently Handel 'prudently declined accepting both' when he realized that 'the Pretender' was the Cardinal's guest (*Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel*, pp. 112-3).

<sup>51</sup> Strohm: 'Handel's pasticci' in *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

All four singers were to become important elements of Handel's 'Second Academy' company.<sup>53</sup>

Towards the end of April 1729 Sir Lyonell Pilkington wrote that 'Handel is doing his endeavour in Italy to procure singers, and I fancy his journey will be of more effect than Heidegger's, but I'm told Senesino is playing an ungrateful part to his friends in England, by abusing 'em behind their backs.'<sup>54</sup> Handel may not have yet gained adequate assurances from all his prospective new singers, and perhaps contemplated re-engaging Senesino: on 16 May 1729 Rolli referred to a forthcoming meeting between Handel and his erstwhile *primo uomo* in Siena. We do not know if this meeting took place; if it was to have been a discussion regarding Senesino's return to London, it was made redundant by Handel's successful engagement of a complete new company of singers.<sup>55</sup> Rolli reported that 'Handel's new company is composed as follows: the ladies Stradina and Somis, Carestini, Balino Fabbri with his wife (to serve on occasion as Third Lady) and an Italo-German bass'.<sup>56</sup> Rolli was inaccurate in a few small respects: Handel had hired Bernacchi instead of Carestini, and the soprano described as 'La Somis' withdrew. Fabri's wife - although possibly hired - never sang in London for Handel. The 'Italo-German bass' was Riemschneider, who was based at Hamburg but whom Handel must have known since their childhood together in Halle.<sup>57</sup> At around the same time, Swiney wrote to the Duke of Richmond that

Mr. Handel (notwithstanding his coming so late into Italy) has made (I think) a very good Company. Comparisons are odious, they say, & I hope none will be

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<sup>53</sup> Carestini did not join Handel's company until 1733. It is possible that the composer was not initially impressed with the castrato. Rolli, in a letter to Senesino dated 16 May 1729, claimed that 'Handel has written that Carestini was emulating Bernacchi' (*Deutsch*, p. 242).

<sup>54</sup> Letter to Godfrey Wentworth, dated 23 April 1729 (Gibson: Op. cit., p. 283).

<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, perhaps the composer and castrato negotiated a deal that the singer would return to London one season later.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to Senesino, dated 16 May 1729 (*Deutsch*, pp. 242-3).

<sup>57</sup> *Deutsch* presumed that Handel engaged Riemschneider at Hamburg (*Deutsch*, p. 243), but Rolli's reference to him pre-dates Handel's departure from Italy. Therefore, it is probable that Handel was in contact with Riemschneider before May 1729, and unlikely that Hamburg was on Handel's itinerary for the return journey to London (Strohm: Op. cit., p. 171).



made between your late Two contending Lady's, & ye present ones. I believe 'twill suffice that this new company (taken in ye. lump) will far Exceed your late one.<sup>58</sup>

Handel's extended visit to Italy during the first half of 1729 was a successful trip: in addition to engaging an impressive new cast of singers against the odds, it was a valuable opportunity to accumulate experience and knowledge that had a considerable influence upon his artistic direction during the Second Academy period. During this Handel first heard the castratos Scalzi and Annibali, and the tenor Pinacci, who all sang for him in London during the 1730s. Handel's ability to absorb musical styles was probably further developed by operas he might have heard or examined. Dean described that 'Wherever he went, he would have attended opera houses, and he certainly collected scores and librettos for future use.'<sup>59</sup> Several of Handel's operas composed after 1729 were based on recent or contemporary librettos that Handel could have collected while in Italy. For example, texts subsequently adapted for Handel's use in London include Orlandini's *Adelaide* (Venice, 1729), which was the model for Handel's *Lotario* (London, 1729), Pariati's *Arianna e Teseo* (set by Leo for Naples in 1729), Metastasio's *Ezio*, and *L'isola di Alcina* (set by Broschi for Rome in 1728 but revived in Parma while Handel may have been there in 1729). It is also possible that Handel could have collected some older librettos, such as Braccoli's *Orlando Furioso* (1727), Zeno's *Faramondo* (set by Gasparini in 1720) and Pariati's *Giustino* (reworked from Beregan's 1683 text, and set by Vivaldi in 1724).<sup>60</sup> Most of Handel's *pasticcios* produced in the 1730s were also modelled on texts probably collected in 1729, and it cannot be coincidental that these *pasticcios* predominantly featured music by the younger Neapolitan-styled composers Vinci and Hasse, such as Handel could have heard in 1729.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Letter dated 16/27 May 1729 (Gibson: Op. cit., p. 282).

<sup>59</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 126.

<sup>60</sup> Strohm: Op. cit., pp. 170-2.

<sup>61</sup> The librettos of Handel's *pasticcios* *Ormisda*, *Venceslao*, *Lucio Papirio*, *Catone*, *Semiramide*, and *Didone Abbandonata* could have all been collected during 1729. Although the majority of arias in Handel's



The return journey probably included a large detour for Handel's last visit to his mother at Halle,<sup>62</sup> where he might also have met Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. On 24 June 1729 the *London Gazette* reported from Hanover that 'Mr. Hendel passed through this Place some Days ago, coming from Italy, and returning to London.'<sup>63</sup> Handel returned to London on 29 June 1729,<sup>64</sup> but his plans for the forthcoming season may have been marred by the death of his friend, principal cellist, and literary collaborator Nicola Haym on 7 August 1729.<sup>65</sup> Haym was serving as Italian Secretary to the opera company at the time of his death, and it is likely that Handel had hoped Haym would adapt more librettos for him. It is reasonable to assume that Handel's operatic plans were disrupted by Haym's untimely decease, although it is impossible to know how much work Haym might have already undertaken for Handel between January and August 1729. We cannot dismiss the possibility that work prepared by Haym could have been posthumously incorporated into some of Handel's 1730s operas, although the inventory of librettos in Haym's library made after his death for an auction catalogue does not present evidence to confirm his involvement in preparing texts for Handel's forthcoming season at the time of his death. The inclusion of Salvi's *Dionisio Re di Portogallo* offers a tenuous connection with Handel's *Sosarme* (1732), but it seems unlikely that the libretto as presented by Handel three years later had anything to do with Haym.<sup>66</sup>

Handel and Heidegger invited an Italian resident in London named Rossi to fill the position left vacant by Haym's death. On 3 September 1729 Rolli sarcastically wrote that 'the famous Rossi, Italian author and poet, is Handel's accredited bard'.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps this was

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pasticcios were by Vinci and Hasse, other composers such as Giacomelli, Orlandini, Lotti, Leo, Sarri, and Vivaldi featured to a lesser extent (Ibid., pp. 200-211).

<sup>62</sup> Handel's mother died in December 1730.

<sup>63</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 243.

<sup>64</sup> Reported in the *Daily Journal* (2 July 1729) and *Brice's Weekly Journal* (4 July 1729). *Deutsch*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>65</sup> On Saturday 9 August 1729 *The Weekly Medley* reported that 'On Thursday ... died at his House in Wardour-street, Old Soho, aged just 50, Mr. Nicholas Francis Haym, a Native of Rome, who was secretary for many Years to the Royal Academy of Musick in this City ... [his] great Abilities, heighten'd by an uncommon Modesty, Candour, Affability, and all the amiable Virtues of Life, make all his Friends sincerely regret his Loss.' (Gibson: Op. cit., pp. 439-40).

<sup>66</sup> Gibson: Appendix F, Ibid., pp. 439-65.

<sup>67</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 245.

Giacomo Rossi, who had versified Aaron Hill's scenario for *Rinaldo* into Italian and prepared *Il Pastor Fido* for Handel nearly two decades earlier. Although Giacomo's existence in London seems to be undocumented after the 1710s, the printed wordbook for the 1731 revival of *Rinaldo* claimed that it was 'Revised, with many Additions, by the Author'.<sup>68</sup> Although it is unclear if any of Handel's other libretti during the 1730s were prepared by Rossi,<sup>69</sup> perhaps the composer considered Rossi a more amiable alternative to the meddling Rolli, who, despite being an appropriately literary candidate, was obviously disenchanted with the Handel-Heidegger enterprise by 6 November 1729 when he remarked 'If everyone were as well satisfied with the company as is the Royal Family, we should have to admit that there never had been such an Opera since Adam and Eve sang Milton's hymns in the garden of Eden.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> I am grateful to Anthony Hicks for pointing out the uncertainty regarding the precise identity of the Rossi whom Rolli alluded to in 1729.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Cummings proposed that in most Second Academy operas 'it is likely that Handel took a very active part in adapting and redesigning his own text, and then issued instructions to his Italian versifier, Rossi, to complete the task in accordance with his wishes.' (Op. cit., pp. 284-5).

<sup>70</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 246.

# Part Two: An Overview of Handel’s Theatre Seasons 1729–1737

Table 1: Handel’s Singers, 1729-1737<sup>71</sup>

Season	Theatre	Singers available to Handel	Notes
1729-30	KT	Strada (s); Bernacchi (a-cas); Bertolli (a); Merighi (a); Fabri (t); Riemschneider (b)	
1730-1	KT	Strada (s); Senesino (a-cas); Bertolli (a); Merighi (a); Fabri (t); Commano (b)	
1731-2	KT	Strada (s); Mrs. Davis (s); Mrs. Turner Robinson (s); Senesino (a-cas); Bertolli (a); Campioli (a-cas); <sup>72</sup> Bagnolesi (a); Pinacci (t); Montagnana (b)	English singers Davis and Turner Robinson not in operas.
1732-3	KT	Strada (s); Gismondi (s); Mrs. Davis (s); Mrs. Wright (s); Senesino (a-cas); Bertolli (a); Montagnana (b)	English singers Davis and Wright not in operas.
1733-4	KT	Strada (s); Maria Rosa Negri (s); Scalzi (s-cas); Carestini (mez-cas); Durastanti (mez); Maria Caterina Negri (a); Reinhold (b); Waltz (b)	
1734-5	CG	Strada (s); Miss Young (s); Maria Rosa Negri (s); Savage (boy s); Carestini (mez-cas); Maria Caterina Negri (a); Beard (t); Howard (t); Stoppelaer (t); Waltz (b)	English singers, chorus and Marie Sallé’s ballet company in operas. Bilingual oratorios; introduction of organ concertos in oratorios. <sup>73</sup>
1736	CG	Strada (s); Savage (boy s); Conti (s-cas); Miss Young (a); Maria Caterina Negri (a); Arrigoni (t); Beard (t); Salway (t); Stoppelaer (t); Erard (b); Reinhold (b); Waltz (b)	Essentially a short season of English works, but concluded with a revival of <i>Ariodante</i> and the new opera <i>Atalanta</i> .
1736-7	CG	Strada (s); Savage (boy s); Conti (s-cas); Annibali (a-cas); Bertolli (a); Maria Caterina Negri (a); Beard (t); Reinhold (b)	The final season of direct competition with ‘The Opera of the Nobility’.

## King’s Theatre, 1729-30

The 1729-30 opera season at the King’s Theatre, Haymarket, was the first of five seasons produced by Handel in collaboration with the impresario Heidegger. There was probably some curiosity regarding Handel’s new group of singers, and those interested seem to have included the royal family: on 10 October 1729 Handel unveiled at least one of his new opera soloists at a private performance for the King George II and Queen Caroline at Kensington. The following day, Princess Amelia wrote to the Duchess of Portland that

<sup>71</sup> Table 1 lists the singers who probably sang for Handel between 1729 and 1737, and complements the chronology of Handel’s relevant theatre seasons outlined in Appendix 1a.

<sup>72</sup> This castrato, who only sang with Handel for one season, is sometimes referred to as ‘Gualandi’.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley Sadie: *Handel Concertos*, p. 27.



‘We had yesterday twice the new Singer her name is Strada it is a charming voice and think her beyond all her predecessors. She is mighty good and easie and hath exactly the way of talking of Cozzony [Cuzzoni]. The others a[re]nt yet come but indeed if they proove [sic] but half as good we shall be very happy this winter’.<sup>74</sup> It is not known what music was performed on this occasion. It is doubtful that arias from the forthcoming opera *Lotario* were used;<sup>75</sup> Burrows suggested that the performance ‘may have included cantatas, as well as arias from operas: no doubt Handel’s cantata repertory was extended by similar performances (before various patrons), of which we know nothing.’<sup>76</sup> On 18 October *The Norwich Gazette* reported that ‘the Harpsichord was played on by Mr. Handell, and their Performances were much approved’,<sup>77</sup> and five days later Princess Amelia wrote that ‘We have heard now all the singers and are mightily satisfied it is the compleatest troop one could have expected’.

The curiosity of less regal audience members might have been appeased by a public rehearsal of *Lotario* on 28 November 1729,<sup>78</sup> a few days before its first performance on 2 December 1729. The opera ran for nine performances, and it seems that its critical reception was unfavourable. Even Mrs. Pendarves, usually a staunch Handelian champion, wrote to her sister Ann Granville after the first performance that *Lotario* ‘is not so meritorious as Mr. Handel’s generally are ... I was never so little pleased with one in my life.’<sup>79</sup> However, the content and tone of Mrs. Pendarves’s letter suggests that her evening at the Opera was a bad experience for personal reasons, which might naturally affected her enjoyment and assessment of the opera. Two weeks later she seems to have revised her opinion:

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<sup>74</sup> Richard G. King: ‘Two new letters from Princess Amelia’ in *HJb* 1994/5, pp. 169-71.

<sup>75</sup> Handel completed, signed, and dated the autograph manuscript of *Lotario* over a month later on 16 November 1729.

<sup>76</sup> Op. cit., pp. 161-2.

<sup>77</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 245.

<sup>78</sup> Mrs. Pendarves’ amusing critique of Handel’s new singers was probably written after attending this rehearsal (Letter to Ann Granville, probably 29 November 1729: *Deutsch*, pp. 247-8).

<sup>79</sup> Letter dated 6 December 1729 (*Deutsch*, p. 249).

The opera is too good for the vile taste of the town: it is condemned never more to appear on the stage after this night. ... We are to have some old opera revived, which I am sorry for, it will put people upon making comparisons between these singers and those that performed before, which will be a disadvantage among the ill-judging multitude. The present opera [i.e. *Lotario*] is disliked because it is too much studied, and they love nothing but minuets and ballads.<sup>80</sup>

Paolo Rolli wrote a scathing report:

Everyone considers it a very bad opera. Bernacchi failed to please ... In person and voice he does not please as much as Senesino, but his great reputation as an artist silences those who cannot find it in them to applaud him ... [Strada] has a penetrating thread of a soprano voice which delights the ear, but oh how far removed from Cuzzona! ... Fabri is a great success. He really sings very well. Would you have believed that a tenor could have had such a triumph here in England? Merighi is really a perfect actress and that is the general opinion. There is a certain Bertolli, who plays men's parts ... She is a pretty one! There is also a bass from Hamburg [Riemschneider], whose voice is more of a natural contralto than a bass. He sings sweetly in his throat and nose, pronounces Italian in the Teutonic manner, acts like a sucking-pig, and looks more like a *valet* than anything.<sup>81</sup>

Rolli concluded that *Lotario* was 'badly cooked' and claimed that Handel had sunk below mediocrity; a comment praising Heidegger for the costumes and scenery might have been thinly veiled sarcasm.<sup>82</sup> Rolli commented that 'They are putting on *Giulio Cesare* because

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<sup>80</sup> Letter dated 20 December 1729. *Deutsch*, p. 250.

<sup>81</sup> Letter of disputed date to Riva in Vienna (*Deutsch*, pp. 249-50). Although Rolli was certainly not an objective source, it ought to be noted that on this occasion his comments correspond with Mrs. Pendarves'.

<sup>82</sup> It is known that the Second Academy retained both costumes and sets from the Royal Academy of Music. While it is possible that new materials were produced for the staging of *Lotario*, it seems to me that Rolli's principal intention in this letter was to satirise the opera. Dean takes Rolli at face value: 'It is noticeable that the operas of these years showed more care for the visual aspect than those in the Academy period, when the vast outlay on star singers undoubtedly abridged the element of spectacle.' (Op. cit., p. 129).



the audiences are falling away fast'. *Giulio Cesare* had been popular with Handel's audience in successive seasons during the mid-1720s,<sup>83</sup> and was a logical choice to aid the floundering new company. The Second Academy revival of the opera was on 17 January 1730. Handel's revisions made for his new cast included the omission and reallocation of several arias. Dean and Knapp suggested that this weakened the fabric of the opera, but the revival ran for nine performances despite the possibility that 'Bernacchi was ageing and not in good voice'.<sup>84</sup> As Mrs. Pendarves observed, it is surprising that Handel decided to revive an opera that provided his audience with an easy opportunity to compare his new singers to their old favourites Senesino, Durastanti, and Cuzzoni. Yet perhaps this did not concern Handel, who probably preferred to revive an old opera that would not require too much preparation while he was preoccupied with composing *Partenope*.<sup>85</sup>

Handel's second new opera of the season was first performed on 24 February 1730. No contemporary written response to *Partenope* has yet been discovered, so it is not known how the Haymarket audience reacted to an opera that was radically different from its predecessors in its antiheroic comic tone. *Partenope* was performed only another six times - which implies it was even less favourably received than *Lotario* - before Handel resorted to another two performances of *Giulio Cesare* at the end of March 1730. Neither of Handel's own new operas matched the success of *Ormisda*, a pasticcio based on a libretto by Apostolo Zeno, and featuring arias by Orlandini, Hasse, Vinci, Leo, and others.<sup>86</sup> Several hypotheses may be proposed about why Handel produced *Ormisda* after his new operas failed and the revival of *Giulio Cesare* lost its novelty, but the most plausible is that it was caused by Handel's increased workload. During the Royal Academy of Music years, the Haymarket opera company had usually divided duties between three composers. In 1729-30 Handel, now in partnership with Heidegger, was for the first time

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<sup>83</sup> The first version of *Giulio Cesare* (1724) was performed 13 times. Its revised version the following season achieved 10 performances.

<sup>84</sup> Winton Dean & John Merrill Knapp: *Handel's Operas 1704-1726*, pp. 503-4.

<sup>85</sup> The most significant alteration to *Giulio Cesare* would have been to adapt the role of Sesto for Fabri, yet most of this work was already done for the tenor Borosini in 1725.

<sup>86</sup> Strohm: 'Handel's pasticci', in *Op. cit.*, pp. 172-3.

in his career solely responsible for the musical direction and provision of an opera house's entire season. He had already composed two new operas that had not achieved commercial success, and it would have been an unattractive prospect to choose and rapidly complete another. It is likely that a pasticcio featuring arias from the repertoires of Fabri, Bernacchi, Merighi, and Strada was a practical convenience saving Handel's time and creative energy, but it should be noted that this method also permitted those singers an opportunity to be heard in a flattering light with music they were familiar with already. Furthermore, it seems likely that Handel had kept the *Ormisda* libretto ready in reserve since the Royal Academy directors had rejected Owen Swiney's recommendation of it in 1726.<sup>87</sup> Handel's arrangement, prepared four years later, was performed at least thirteen times. Despite Mrs. Pendarves reacting to a rehearsal of *Ormisda* with alarm,<sup>88</sup> the pasticcio was the most often performed work during Handel's 1729-30 season. It was the only occasion during the composer's career when one of his pasticcio arrangements eclipsed his own works: perhaps the use of arias composed by acclaimed Italian composers aroused the curiosity of fashionably-minded members of Handel's audience.

After the success of *Ormisda*, the season concluded with seven performances of *Tolomeo*. This opera was the last that Handel had composed for the Royal Academy, and its revival in 1730 was announced in the *Daily Journal* as 'With several Alterations. The Opera being short, it will not begin till Seven o'Clock'.<sup>89</sup> The most surprising of these alterations was the substitution of one of Handel's finest duets originally composed for Senesino and Cuzzoni ('Se il cor ti perde') for another ('Io t' abbraccio' from *Rodelinda*). Like the recent revival of *Giulio Cesare*, this demonstrates that Handel was not afraid to assign his new singers music that would inevitably lead to direct comparisons with their predecessors.

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<sup>87</sup> The pasticcio *Venceslao*, produced by Handel the following season, was also the legacy of an unsuccessful proposal to the Royal Academy by Swiney (Gibson: 'The Royal Academy of Music and its Directors', p. 149).

<sup>88</sup> 'Operas are dying, to my great mortification' (4 April 1730: *Deutsch*, p. 254).

<sup>89</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 254.



On 12 June 1730, the day before the final performance of the season, Rolli reported that ‘The musicians will be paid, and that is all that can be done. I perceive besides that either there will be no operas in the new season or there will be the same Company, which is most certainly going from bad to worse.’<sup>90</sup> Although the quality of Handel’s music composed for these singers makes Rolli’s opinions appear partisan towards Cuzzoni and Senesino, one assumes that the 1729-30 season was not a critical or financial success. Yet the cluster of Handel’s four original operas performed between November 1729 and June 1730 efficiently covers an impressive range of his operatic styles: *Lotario* is a conventional *opera seria*; *Giulio Cesare* a grand heroic epic; *Partenope* an antiheroic comedy; *Tolomeo* a mixture of pastoral and dynastic drama. The 1729-30 season was a makeshift prototype designed to present as much diversity as possible. Handel retained and developed this artistic policy during the remaining years of the Second Academy period.

### King’s Theatre, 1730-31

By the end of June 1730 Handel was already planning his next season. His letter to Francis Colman, an opera agent residing in Florence, reveals that Merighi had been re-engaged for the following season. However, Handel wished Colman to recruit a new female soprano who ‘should be equally good at male and female parts’, and ‘one man ... for the coming season’.<sup>91</sup> Handel also corresponded with Owen Swiney in Bologna, whose letter to Francis Colman indicates that Handel’s preferred candidate for the male singer vacancy was his former *primo uomo* Senesino.<sup>92</sup> The return of Senesino is not surprising: it seems that Bernacchi had not been popular in London, and he returned to Italy. Handel ‘eventually conceded that Senesino’s popularity with London audiences outweighed his disadvantages’.<sup>93</sup> An unsuccessful attempt to engage the female soprano Pisani was a blessing in disguise because the cost of persuading Senesino to return to England was

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<sup>90</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 254.

<sup>91</sup> Handel’s letter to Francis Colman dated 19/30 June 1730 (*Deutsch*, p. 256).

<sup>92</sup> Apparently Handel considered Carestini again, but he was already contracted to sing at Milan.

<sup>93</sup> Burrows: *Op. cit.*, p. 131.



higher than expected: the original budget allocated to cover the salaries of both new additions to the company was 1100 guineas, yet Colman engaged only Senesino for a promised salary of 1400 guineas. Perhaps Handel decided that he would rather give his audience what they wanted rather than endure another disappointing season. Handel wrote to Colman that 'the Court and Nobility will ... [have] a company to their taste', that 'we shall content ourselves with the five':<sup>94</sup> Strada, Fabri, Bertolli, Merighi, and Senesino. The company was expanded to six singers when Commano replaced Riemschneider.<sup>95</sup>

Almost a month in advance of the 1730-1 season, the *Daily Journal* reported that 'There are Grand Preparations making at the Opera-House in the May-Market, by New Cloaths, Scenes, &c. And, Senesino being arrived, they will begin to perform as soon as the Court comes to St. James's.' The season opened on 3 November 1730 with a revival of *Scipione*.<sup>96</sup> Burrows noted that perhaps 'both the composer and his leading man were content with revivals of operas that included proven roles composed for Senesino.'<sup>97</sup> Although *Scipione* was performed fewer times than the ill-fated *Lotario* almost a year previously, six performances was a reasonably successful figure for a revival of an old opera. Handel never repeated his attempt to commence a new season with a new opera again, and his apparent reluctance to repeat the experiment may not be coincidental to the failure of *Lotario*.<sup>98</sup> From 1730 onwards Handel always reserved his important new operas for early in the New Year, presumably in order to attract attendance from aristocratic patrons who had spent the first part of winter away from London.

Dean and Knapp remarked that Handel's radical revisions to *Scipione* 'went much further than was required' and that 'Neither the opera nor the characters ... gained much from this',<sup>99</sup> but perhaps Handel's extra effort in revising the opera suggests he was keen to

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<sup>94</sup> Letter dated 27 September/16 October 1730 (*Deutsch*, pp. 261-2).

<sup>95</sup> Commano appears to have sung only recitatives and the bass part in ensembles for Handel.

<sup>96</sup> This was preceded by a public rehearsal on 31 October 1730 (Dean & Knapp: *Op. cit.*, p. 618).

<sup>97</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Handel waited until 26 January 1734 for the first performance of *Arianna in Creta* although he had completed composing the first draft on 5 October 1733. We can observe similar patterns with *Porro* in 1730-1, *Sosarme* in 1731-2, *Orlando* in 1732-3 and *Ariodante* in 1734-5.

<sup>99</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 618-9.

provide an effectively spectacular opening to the season. Five performances of *Ormisda* were an attempt to capitalise upon its popularity six months earlier. It was presented in a revised form; many of Handel's changes were made to accommodate Senesino, although members of the cast who had taken part in performances the previous season also sang different arias.<sup>100</sup> Handel then chose to revive *Partenope*: when it was first produced the previous season the total of only seven performances must have disappointed Handel. Maybe its relative failure was due to the unpopularity of Bernacchi, and perhaps Handel believed that Senesino's performance as Arsace would give the opera a chance to be better appreciated.<sup>101</sup> If so, it is difficult to assess whether this strategy worked. *Partenope* was performed seven times between 12 December 1730 and 9 January 1731 – the same number of performances as during its first run almost a year earlier.<sup>102</sup>

In order to fill the gap between the last performance of *Partenope* and the introduction of the new opera *Poro*, Handel directed several performances of *Venceslao* in mid-January 1731. This pasticcio repeated the *Ormisda* formula, using a libretto by Zeno and featuring music by Capelli, Vinci, Hasse, and Lotti. Strohm suggested that Handel may 'have had the performance of *Venceslao* in mind at least by May 1730 ... and possibly even as early as 1729'.<sup>103</sup> If so, *Venceslao* might have already been substantially prepared, and ready to use at short notice if required. Handel's concentration presumably lay elsewhere: in early December 1730 he was composing *Poro*, and by the beginning of January 1731 he would have been busy filling out the score, refining the composition, and completing his

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<sup>100</sup> Three of Senesino's arias were from Orlandini's *Adelaide*, which he had sung at Venice in 1729 (Clausen: *Händels Direktionspartituren*, pp. 184-7).

<sup>101</sup> The presence of Senesino initiating a revival of *Partenope* is a curious twist of fate: it was Senesino who had told Owen Swiney that the Royal Academy was considering a setting of Stampiglia's scandalous libretto in 1726, thus provoking Swiney's agitated letter to the Duke of Richmond protesting against it (discussed in Chapter 2). It is ironic that Handel chose to mark the return of his awkward star castrato by giving him the role of the undignified and antiheroic Arsace in an opera that can be interpreted as a satire on the heroic *primo uomo* convention.

<sup>102</sup> Appendix 1a illustrates that seven performances is a respectable achievement compared to many other revivals during the Second Academy period.

<sup>103</sup> Op. cit., pp. 173-9. It is possible that preparation began on *Venceslao* even earlier: Owen Swiney recommended the libretto during the Royal Academy period (Gibson: 'The Royal Academy of Music and its Directors', p. 149).



ambitious new opera.<sup>104</sup> The availability of *Venceslao*, possibly already in an advanced condition of preparation, would have necessitated only minor distraction from work on *Porro*. Additionally, Handel might have suspected that the successful formula used for *Ormisda* could be repeated again without risk. However, any anticipation of a success similar to *Ormisda* the previous season was disappointed: *Venceslao* was performed only four times.

In contrast, *Porro*, first performed on 2 February 1731, was exceptionally popular. It was unusual for Handel's seasons to feature only one original new opera, yet this was probably a deliberate precaution: in advance of the 1730-1 season he informed Colman that he had 'already chosen the operas to fit our present company.'<sup>105</sup> His cautious reservation of *Porro* until early 1731 was vindicated by sixteen performances. It was one of the biggest successes of his opera career in London,<sup>106</sup> possibly to some extent due to the especially strong title-role created for Senesino: the arias 'Senza procella ancora' (II.vi) and 'Dov'è, s' affretti per me la morte' (III.viii) are among Handel's most brilliant creations for Senesino's preferred characterisation as a heroic lover.

The resurrection of Handel's first London opera *Rinaldo*, originally produced in 1711, was an unpredictable artistic decision. Last revived in 1717, *Rinaldo* was never performed by the Royal Academy of Music, which seems to have consciously avoided 'magic' operas. Its reintroduction to the London stage on 6 April 1731 implies that Handel and Heidegger must have decided the spectacular *Rinaldo* was the right opera to help them consolidate upon the success of *Porro* (a dissimilar drama, but a comparably opulent

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<sup>104</sup> The autograph manuscript of *Porro* (R.M.20.b.13, British Library) contains annotations that Act I was completed on 23 December, and Act II on 30 December 1730. The opera was completed, signed, and dated on 16 January 1731 - the same day as the second performance of *Venceslao* (Burrows & Ronish: *A Catalogue of Handel's Musical Autographs*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994). Cummings suggested that Handel commenced composing *Porro* much earlier, possibly in July or August 1730 (See Cummings: Op. cit., pp. 78, 131-33).

<sup>105</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 261.

<sup>106</sup> Among the seasons relevant to this thesis, only *Alcina* in 1734-5 received more performances during its first run (see Appendix 1a).



work).<sup>107</sup> On 2 April 1731 the *Daily Journal* advertised that the opera would be performed ‘With New Scenes and Cloaths’, and explained the break between opera performances with the excuse that ‘Great Preparations being required to bring this opera on the Stage, is the Reason that no Opera can be perform’d till Tuesday next.’<sup>108</sup> Whether or not this advertisement disclosed the truthful reason why the opera was not yet ready, Burrows observed that it was ‘very unlikely that the original scenic effects and costumes would have survived the 14 years since the previous production’.<sup>109</sup> Not much of the original music survived through to the revival either: David Kimbell summarised that ‘Of some 40 musical numbers in the original *Rinaldo*, approximately a quarter were preserved essentially unaltered; a quarter were transposed to suit different types of voice; a quarter were more fundamentally revised, or transformed in effect by being reallocated to different characters; a quarter were dropped altogether. To compensate ... Handel composed two new movements, and borrowed eight more from other operas.’<sup>110</sup> Kimbell considered that ‘the 1731 version of *Rinaldo* marked a more radical transformation of the original work than Handel ever made of any other of his Italian operas’.<sup>111</sup> The revival involved a large amount of work for the composer, the libretto adapter Rossi, and the conducting score copyist. However, Dean and Knapp observed that alterations which affected ‘important details of the plot as well as almost every musical number’ may have been made to ‘lighten the load of the singers, who in the season 1730/1 had to learn six new operas; five of the imported arias had been sung by the same artists in earlier works (four in *Lotario*, one in *Giulio Cesare*).’<sup>112</sup>

It is also possible that Handel chose to revive *Rinaldo* because its strong title role was ripe material for Senesino, who had not sung famous arias such as ‘Cara sposa’ before.

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<sup>107</sup> It seems that Handel’s mind was on his first London operas for some reason during the early 1730s. Neither *Rinaldo* nor *Il Pastor Fido* fitted the casts of singers available to him two decades after their first productions, but it is striking that he chose to revive them nonetheless.

<sup>108</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 273.

<sup>109</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>110</sup> Kimbell: ‘Preface’ to *Rinaldo* [critical edition of 1731 score], *HHA*, p. XI.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 186.

It is significant that the only substantial new music composed for the revival was ‘*Orrori menzogneri*’, an extended *accompagnato* for Senesino containing sudden changes of mood contrasted with two substantial ritornellos (*Rinaldo*, 1731 version, III.vii). Handel followed this *accompagnato* with an elaborate virtuosic aria ‘*Vedrò piu liete e belle*’ borrowed from *Lotario*. Maybe Handel’s main reason for this new scene was insufficient quality or quantity of available trumpeters required for Rinaldo’s climactic 1711 aria ‘*Or la tromba*’ (cut in 1731), but the new 1731 scene appears to have been conceived specifically for Senesino’s vocal and dramatic strengths. Although the 1731 *Rinaldo* was perhaps less visually entertaining and fantastical without the dragons, storms, cavalry, sparrows, fountains, and mermaids that conceivably made it appear lavish twenty years earlier, Handel’s last revival of the opera received a reasonably successful run of six performances.

The decision to conclude the 1730-1 season with a revival of *Rodelinda* was probably another measure to accommodate Senesino, for whom Handel created the opera’s *primo uomo* role Bertarido in 1725. It was also an opera that suited the rest of Handel’s cast well without extensive modifications required. Fabri was a suitable tenor for the role of Grimoaldo, composed in 1725 for Borosini (although several of Fabri’s own arias from *Lotario* were inserted); Merighi probably sang Eduige, and Bertolli most likely sang Unulfo. One of the most surprising alterations was Handel’s substitution of the duet ‘*Io t’abbraccio*’ at the end of Act II in favour of ‘*Se il cor*’ from *Tolomeo*. Paradoxically, Strada had already performed ‘*Io t’abbraccio*’ the previous season in a revival of *Tolomeo*, when it had supplanted ‘*Se il cor*’. The two duets might have been regarded as interchangeable, or perhaps Handel wanted to avoid restoring such memorable music to its original context so soon after it had been heard at the King’s Theatre in a different guise.<sup>113</sup>

According to information contained in an advertisement published in the *Daily Courant* on 22 May 1731,<sup>114</sup> Handel and Heidegger were only obliged to perform

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<sup>113</sup> I can find no evidence to support Dean and Knapp’s suggestion that Strada already knew ‘*Se il cor*’ (Op. cit., p. 592), although it may be true. Only Senesino had definitely sung both duets before.

<sup>114</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 274.



*Rodelinda* six times in order to reach a required total of fifty performances promised to subscribers during the 1730-1 season; the performances on 25 and 29 May were conducted in order to compensate subscribers for their failure to reach that target the previous season. Presumably the Second Academy's 1730-1 season was a comfortable success compared to the previous year. Confirmation of this might be interpreted from Handel's purchase of £200 of South Sea Annuities on 5th June 1731, only a week after the season had ended.<sup>115</sup> An impressive range of projects suitable for Senesino dominated the artistic direction of the 1730-1 season, but variety between different operatic experiences is evident in the conventional dynastic *opera seria* in *Scipione*, the struggles between monarchs and lovers in *Poro* and *Rodelinda*, the lighter romantic entertainment in *Partenope* and escapist enchantment in *Rinaldo*.

### King's Theatre, 1731-2

Handel's company of singers changed again by the beginning of the 1731-2 season.

Graham Cummings explained that:

three singers had left Handel's company, namely the contralto Antonia Margherita Merighi, the fine tenor Annibale Fabri, and the weak baritone Giovanni Commano. ... Both Merighi and Fabri were singers of considerable ability, and to that extent their departure for Italy must have been a regrettable loss to Handel ... at least three replacements were needed if the activities of the Second Academy were not to be disrupted ... Giovanni Battista Pinacci (tenor) and Antonio Montagnana (bass) were singers of the first rank, but the alto castrato Antonio Gualandi (Campioli), who had been singing in Hamburg, was an artist of much more modest attainments. A fourth new Italian singer, the contralto Anna Maria Antonia Bagnolesi, was admitted to the company probably during November 1731.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 275. However, it is misleading to assume that Handel's personal financial situation was dependent upon the economical condition of the opera companies with which he was associated.

<sup>116</sup> Op. cit., pp. 438-9.



The choice of *Tamerlano* to open the new season on 13 November 1731 ‘probably reflects the fact that Handel had ... gained a good tenor in Pinacci, who could do justice to the part of Bajazet’.<sup>117</sup> This was Handel’s only revival of *Tamerlano*. Terence Best observed that ‘in November 1731 Handel made no changes to the pitch of the voices, and very few to the arias ... The most important change was the shortening of many of the recitatives.’<sup>118</sup> In 1724 the bass Boschi had been given very little to do as Irene’s confidante Leone, but in 1731 Handel had the talented bass Montagnana at his disposal, so a formidable new scene for Leone was added including the aria ‘Nel mondo e nell’abisso’ (transferred from *Riccardo Primo*). Compared to other revivals of Royal Academy operas during the early 1730s, the 1731 version of *Tamerlano* has unusual fidelity to the first performance version, but it was performed only three times.

The revival of *Poro* on 23 November 1731 certainly capitalised upon its success the previous season. Cummings proposed that Handel might have welcomed the ‘opportunity to correct the opera’s principal weakness, namely the inadequate portrayal of Timagene ... In Metastasio’s *Alessandro nell’Indie* Timagene was a character of some importance with two solo scenes (I.v; II.xi) and a dialogue scene with Poro which included a further exit aria for Timagene (III.vii). These passages, particularly the first two, are important because they clarify Timagene’s motivation for betraying Alessandro and assisting his enemy, Poro. In the first version of *Poro* these scenes were not included ... With the acquisition of such a powerful bass voice as Montagnana’s, Handel could now restore some dramatic balance to the opera by inserting the omitted scenes for Timagene.’<sup>119</sup> Other than the expansion of Timagene’s role, Handel carried out few adjustments. These are dramatically meaningful enough for Cummings to evaluate that the revised version is ‘not only ... the most complete, but also the most dramatically balanced version of the opera.’ However,

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<sup>117</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 132. Handel might have already decided to revive *Tamerlano* for a cast including Fabri, who was equally capable of singing Bajazet.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Preface’ in *Tamerlano*, HHA, p. xxiv.

<sup>119</sup> Cummings: Op. cit, pp. 438, 439-40.

the King's Theatre audience was probably less interested in Handel fine-tuning the dramatic coherence of his old operas than in seeing something new or novel: the revival of *Porro* ran for only four performances.

The Royal Academy of Music's continuing legacy was evident in the revival of *Admeto*. No doubt Handel was capitalising upon his old repertoire for Senesino, but we ought not discount the possibility that the composer wished to revive some of his best old operas because of personal fondness for them or a recognition of their artistic merit: the supernatural beginning of *Admeto* ('Orride larve ... Chiudetevi, miei lumi') is among the most potent dramatic soliloquies he wrote for Senesino. Unfortunately, precise details of the 1731 revival of *Admeto* are unknown because the conducting score is lost.<sup>120</sup> The bass role of Ercole was transposed up for Pinacci, and the soprano role of Alceste was transposed down for Bagnolesi,<sup>121</sup> probably making her London debut. The revival ran for seven performances between 7 December 1731 and 11 January 1732.<sup>122</sup>

Handel probably acquired a libretto of Metastasio's *Ezio* during his trip to Italy in 1729. It is not known when he completed composing his setting of it, but the autograph manuscript shows that he initially intended to compose an entirely different opera called *Titus l'Empéreur*.<sup>123</sup> He must have abandoned *Titus* by autumn 1731, and completed most of his work on *Ezio* by the end that year in order for it to be ready, copied and rehearsed in time for its first performance on 15 January 1732.<sup>124</sup> Despite being one of Handel's best

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<sup>120</sup> Handel's revisions of *Tamerlano* and *Porro* were prepared in an unusually thoughtful manner: much of the original music was retained at the original pitch; alterations were sympathetic to the drama and created minimum disturbance to the quality of the score. Presumably the *Admeto* revival may have been similar. However, it seems that Handel's sequence of judicious revisions was broken by his emergency responses to the failure of *Ezio* and to the pirate performances of *Esther* and *Acis and Galatea*.

<sup>121</sup> Strada performed the role of Antigona. Perhaps that role, originally composed for Cuzzoni, fitted her voice better than Alceste (which was written for Faustina). Maybe it was easier for Handel to assign Strada the slightly less prominent 'Rival Queen' role than adapt an entire part for her voice.

<sup>122</sup> *Admeto* was notably popular during its first run between January and April 1727 (nineteen performances).

<sup>123</sup> *Titus* was abandoned, possibly at the same time Handel decided to set *Ezio* instead. Strohm proposed that *Titus* was modelled upon Racine's *Bérénice*: 'A possible hypothesis is that Handel wanted to adapt Racine's original text as an opera without any intervening model to work from, and the librettist (Rossi?) was simply not equal to the demands of such a task' ('Handel and his Italian opera texts', pp. 62-3).

<sup>124</sup> Burrows suggested that a 'delay might well have been caused' due to Handel finishing the opera behind schedule. This would account for the surprisingly high number of performances of the revived *Admeto*, although the first performance of *Ezio* corresponds approximately with the date of Handel's introduction of new operas in other Second Academy seasons (Burrows: Op. cit., p. 132).



serious political dramas, *Ezio* was one of the worst failures of his career. Performed only five times, it was probably an expensive disaster: Colman's *Opera Register* listed 'In Janry Ezia - a New Opera, Clothes & all ye Scenes New - but did not draw much Company'.<sup>125</sup> As had been done previously, Handel resorted to a revival of *Giulio Cesare*. The exact content of this revival is obscure, but Senesino performed the title role for the first time since 1725.<sup>126</sup> Even *Giulio Cesare* was not a success, with only four performances. Perhaps its previous revival was too recent in the audience's memory, or maybe the artistic strategy of Senesino revisiting his best old roles was now losing its novelty value. Dean regarded it as 'a makeshift revival due to the failure of *Ezio* and the fact that the next new opera, *Sosarme*, was not ready.'<sup>127</sup>

Handel's autograph manuscript of *Sosarme* was completed only eleven days before the opera's first performance on 15 February 1732. This implies that haste surrounded the completion and rehearsal of the opera. Dean assessed that '*Sosarme* is something of a problem child' and considered that its libretto is problematic. However, Handel's audiences apparently agreed with Dean's assertion that *Sosarme* 'is full of magnificent music'.<sup>128</sup> Viscount Percival wrote in his diary on 22 February 1732 that 'I went to the Opera Sosarmis, made by Hendel, which takes with the town, and that justly, for it is one of the best I ever heard.'<sup>129</sup> *Sosarme* was performed eleven times.

Handel's revival of Ariosti's *Coriolano* on 25 March 1732 was an unprecedented decision for the Second Academy to perform an old Royal Academy opera by a different composer. The dynamic plot features one of Senesino's most impressive Royal Academy roles, including a noteworthy prison scene. It invites speculation that there might have been some influence on Handel to revive certain Royal Academy operas from musicians

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<sup>125</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 282.

<sup>126</sup> No known libretto for the 1732 *Giulio Cesare* was issued.

<sup>127</sup> Dean: 'Preface' in *Giulio Cesare*, Oxford, p. x.

<sup>128</sup> 'Handel's *Sosarme*, a Puzzle Opera' in *Essays on Opera*, pp. 45-6. Part of the problem may be due to the heavy abridgement of Salvi's original libretto, further aggravated by a hasty change of location and character names during the compositional process.

<sup>129</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 285.



who had taken part in the original performances, or from patrons with fond memories of the old repertoire. Five performances of *Coriolano*, and four subsequent performances of a revised *Flavio*, confirm Handel's clear indebtedness to the Royal Academy operas as suitable fodder for revivals. However, it is significant that the style of each Royal Academy opera revived in the 1731-2 season is distinctive, with the anti-heroic *Flavio* juxtaposed by the melodramatic (and often ironic) *Admeto*, the grand heroism of *Giulio Cesare*, the tragedy of *Tamerlano*, and the re-introduction of *Coriolano*: an opera that had been notably popular during its first run in 1723.<sup>130</sup> Despite the common origin of these five operas, their inclusion together in 1731-2 is evidence that Handel deliberately nurtured diversity in his dramatic subjects across a season.

In the meantime, an external event celebrating Handel's 47<sup>th</sup> birthday on 23 February 1732 had a massive impact upon his career. Bernard Gates, the Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal Choir, organised and directed a performance of Handel's *Esther* at the Crown and Anchor tavern in the Strand.<sup>131</sup> 'The Oratorium', as it was often known at that time, was probably composed and privately performed for James Brydges, the Earl of Carnarvon (later Duke of Chandos), perhaps at his country estate Cannons in or around 1718.<sup>132</sup> Gates' performance of the Cannons version was intended solely as a birthday tribute without Handel's personal contribution, but a couple of further performances were well received, and perhaps it was at this time that Handel began to suspect the commercial potential of producing *Esther* at the King's Theatre.

If Handel had begun to consider the commercial potential of English oratorio, he was stimulated into action on or before 17 April 1732, when a 'pirate' performance of *Esther* was given without his consent. There is no proof about who organised this, but it

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<sup>130</sup> Gibson: Op. cit., pp. 178-80.

<sup>131</sup> Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 203-5.

<sup>132</sup> It is uncertain exactly when *Esther* was composed, and the date and location of its first performance is unknown. Howard Serwer's *HHA* edition and both commercial CD recordings opt for 1718, but John Roberts doubts that the 'first' version of the oratorio was completed until after Handel visited Dresden in summer 1719 (personal communication). For convenience, I refer to the first complete extant version of *Esther* as the Cannons version throughout the dissertation.

was probably Thomas Arne senior, who certainly attempted a similar pirate performance of *Acis and Galatea* the following month.<sup>133</sup> One assumes that Handel's ire was provoked by unwelcome local competition prepared to use his own music against him, although perhaps the success of Arne's performances suggested to him that he should try producing English music theatre works. He acted quickly, and on 19 April 1732 - just after the revival of *Flavio* was first performed - the following announcement appeared in the *Daily Journal*:

By His Majesty's Command. At the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market, on Tuesday the 2nd Day of May, will be performed, *The Sacred Story of ESTHER: an Oratorio in English*. Formerly composed by Mr. *Handel*, and now revised by him, with several Additions, and to be performed by a great Number of the best Voices and Instruments. N.B. There will be no Action on the Stage, but the House will be fitted up in a decent Manner, for the Audience. The Musick to be disposed after the Manner of the Coronation Service.<sup>134</sup>

It was unusual for an announcement to appear so long in advance of the performance. It appears as if Handel determined to discredit his rivals, especially by prominently advertising that *Esther* had been 'revised by him, with several Additions'. It is also noteworthy that this intriguing newspaper advert emphasizes the superiority of Handel's singers and players, and attempted to offer extra novelty by the music being 'disposed after the Manner of the Coronation Service'. Handel - or the person responsible for the King's Theatre's press announcements - was making a transparent effort to clarify that the new *Esther* was a far more attractive entertainment than the rival performances given without the composer's permission. Handel should not have required an excuse to revise *Esther* for public performance. Perhaps he needed Arne's hostile action to upset him and spur him into action, but it is not impossible that his decision to remould *Esther* was partly influenced by the score's quality and potential.

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<sup>133</sup> Dean: *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>134</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 288-9.



*Esther* was performed six times between 2 and 20 May 1732. During these performances, Handel's competitors quickly switched to performing his other major Cannons music drama *Acis and Galatea*. Arne's company at the New Theatre, Haymarket, advertised it in the *Daily Post* on 6 May 1732 as 'a Pastoral OPERA ... With all the Grand Chorus's, Scenes, Machines, and other Decorations; being the first Time it ever was performed in a Theatrical Way.'<sup>135</sup> The pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* indicates that Arne's performances of *Acis and Galatea* were more popular than Handel's Italian operas.<sup>136</sup> As before, Handel's responded with his own authorized revision, announced in the *Daily Courant* on 5 June 1732. Once again, this drew special attention to the fact that it had been revised by Handel 'with several Additions', and that it would be 'performed by a great Number of the best Voices and Instruments'. The announcement also indicated that 'There will be no Action on the Stage, but the Scene will represent, in a Picturesque Manner, a rural Prospect, with Rocks, Groves, Fountains and Grotto's; amongst which will be disposed a Chorus of Nymphs and Shepherds, Habits, and every other Decoration suited to the Subject.'<sup>137</sup> Despite the indication that there would be no action, it was clear that Handel and Heidegger were emphasising the visual sumptuousness of their entertainment compared to the poorer illegitimate alternative across the road.

While Handel was presumably preparing his drastically revised version of *Acis and Galatea* between late May and early June 1732, his company performed *Lucio Papirio Dittatore*. Strohm remarked that the success of *Esther* 'would have made further opera performances unnecessary. That Handel nevertheless produced *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* on 23 May is explained by the fact that this opera had been planned beforehand and possibly even rehearsed before the unexpected success of *Esther*'.<sup>138</sup> Although classified in Handel literature as a pasticcio, this setting of Zeno's libretto utilized a complete score by

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<sup>135</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 291.

<sup>136</sup> 'I left the *Italian* opera, the House was so thin, and cross'd over the way to the *English* one, which was so full I was forc'd to croud in upon the stage' (*Deutsch*, pp. 300-1).

<sup>137</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 293.

<sup>138</sup> 'Handel's pasticci', p. 177.



Giacomelli that Handel probably heard at Parma in 1729. Strohm observed that *Lucio Papirio* is 'the only one of Handel's London productions that was a new work by an Italian with virtually no changes, at least as far as the arias, choruses and sinfonia were concerned.'<sup>139</sup> But apparently 'it did not take'<sup>140</sup> with the audience, and received only four performances. Handel's season concluded with four performances of the 'new' *Acis and Galatea*, which was a compound of the original Cannons masque in English and elements of the serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* composed in Naples in 1708. In addition to asserting Handel's ownership of the work, the reorganized version of *Acis and Galatea* was Handel's first bilingual theatre work for London. Dean described that it was 'a retrograde step in two ways: it ruined the work, and helped to seal the fate of English opera ... Quite apart from its two languages, Handel's 1732 Serenata was a preposterous affair. It is immensely long, cumbersome, and unbalanced ... there arose five new characters, ... all presumably shepherds by profession and perfectly irrelevant to the plot.'<sup>141</sup>

Although the artistic planning of Handel's 1731-2 season became haphazard in its later stages as the composer responded competitively to external events, elements of it served as the template for its immediate successors: the mix of new and old operas composed by Handel, pasticcios featuring music by other composers, an old Royal Academy opera by one of Handel's former colleagues, and the novelty of music theatre in the English language combined to provide unprecedented diversity in the Second Academy's activities.

### King's Theatre, 1732-3

Milhous and Hume judged that the 1732-3 season 'was a difficult year for Handel', but that the composer 'mounted a good season, including a pasticcio based on Leo's *Catone in*

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Colman's *Opera Register*, 23 May 1732 (*Deutsch*, p. 292).

<sup>141</sup> *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 172-3. There was certainly little aesthetic merit in the revision, but it must have had a reasonably good reception because Handel revived the 'serenata' again in December 1732, July 1733, May 1734, March 1736, December 1739, February 1741, and at Dublin in January 1742.

*Utica*, some revivals and two major new works, *Orlando ...* and the oratorio *Deborah*.<sup>142</sup>

The overall season was certainly as varied as its predecessor, and less influenced by external rivalries. Pinacci, Bagnolesi, and Campioli had all left the company. Strada, Senesino and Montagnana remained. The soprano Celeste Gismondi was the only new addition to Handel's cast. Rumours were beginning to spread about the formation of a rival opera company.<sup>143</sup> The season commenced on 4 November 1732 with *Catone in Utica*, a pasticcio based on Leo's setting of a libretto by Metastasio that Handel probably saw at the Venice Carnival in 1729. Handel retained a few of Leo's original arias, and supplemented them with music by Hasse, Porpora, and Vivaldi.<sup>144</sup> It ran for five performances, but the only known contemporary response is based on a misunderstanding: Lord Hervey did not realize that the opera was not a new work by Handel, and described it as 'a long, dull, and consequently tiresome Opera of Handel's, whose genius seems quite exhausted.'<sup>145</sup>

Handel's genius was far from exhausted, but perhaps it was being distracted by the composition of *Orlando*, which was completed on 20 November 1732. Handel wished to reserve *Orlando* for January, so five days after completing it he produced a revival of the Royal Academy opera *Alessandro*, with extensive changes.<sup>146</sup> Colman's Opera Register recorded 'King &c all at ye Opera a full House' at the first performance on 25 November 1732, but apparently the second performance three days later brought only 'a thin House'.<sup>147</sup> The increasingly small audiences at *Alessandro* might explain Handel's decision to produce his recently revised *Acis and Galatea* on 2 December 1732, although Handel's desire to compete with the English opera company across the road at the New Theatre may have influenced the schedule. *Acis* was performed only four times, and another three repeat performances of *Alessandro* may have been used to fill time before a revival of *Tolomeo* was prepared for 2 January 1733. This version of *Tolomeo* was

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<sup>142</sup> Milhous & Hume: 'Handel's Opera Finances in 1732-3', p. 86.

<sup>143</sup> The pamphlet *See and Seem Blind*, quoted in Burrows: Op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>144</sup> Strohm: Op. cit., pp. 180-2.

<sup>145</sup> Letter dated 31 October 1732 (*Deutsch*, p. 296).

<sup>146</sup> Clausen: Op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>147</sup> Entries dated 25 November and 28 November 1732 (*Deutsch*, p. 298).



probably very similar to that performed at the end of the 1729-30 season.<sup>148</sup> It was performed only four times; its primary function was probably to enable the preparation of *Orlando*, Handel's only entirely new composition created for the 1732-3 season.

When *Orlando* was first performed on the 27 January 1733, the *Daily Journal* announced that 'the Cloaths and Scenes are all entirely New',<sup>149</sup> and Colman's Opera Register described the opera as 'extraordinary fine & magnificent - perform'd several times until Saturday March 3d'.<sup>150</sup> Most Handel literature concurs that *Orlando* is Handel's finest opera created for the Second Academy.<sup>151</sup> The celebrated 'mad scene' at the end of Act II is an extraordinary extended scene for Senesino, and the music for Strada, Gismondi, and Montagnana is of comparable quality. *Orlando* seems to have been a success, but its initial run was interrupted after six performances by Strada's illness.<sup>152</sup> The revised *Floridante*, produced on 3 March 1733, was necessary while Strada recovered: the title role featured several fine arias written for Senesino a dozen years earlier, and the opera only required one soprano role that could have been sung by Gismondi. The stopgap *Floridante* was performed four times.

In the meantime, Handel had completed his new oratorio *Deborah* on 21 February 1733. Handel 'may have deliberately timed his second experiment with oratorio to fall into the Lenten season: the first night of *Deborah* was on the eve of Palm Sunday'.<sup>153</sup> Set to a libretto by Samuel Humphreys, *Deborah* is Handel's first attempt to create an oratorio for a public audience, but the audience seems to have been displeased that the composer and Heidegger attempted to charge higher ticket prices.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps this decision was made because of increased expenditure owing to hiring an unusually large number of

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<sup>148</sup> Clausen lists only a few alterations (Op. cit., pp. 242-3).

<sup>149</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 303.

<sup>150</sup> 3 February 1733 (Ibid., p. 304).

<sup>151</sup> For example, Dean proclaims it 'one of the most original of Handel's operas in design' and 'also one of the richest in musical invention.' (*Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 242).

<sup>152</sup> Milhous & Hume: Op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>153</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>154</sup> The decision provoked a satirical epigram in the *Bee*, comparing Handel to Walpole's unpopular excise proposals (24 March 1733: *Deutsch*, p. 309).



musicians,<sup>155</sup> but the attempt to charge a one-guinea entrance fee backfired when subscribers insisted on using their silver ticket.<sup>156</sup> Although the oratorio received six performances, contemporary reports focus almost exclusively on the unpopularity of the ticket prices. On 7 April 1733 the *Craftsman* published a letter, attributed to Paolo Rolli, which declared that Handel 'has grown so insolent ... The Absurdity, Extravagancy, and Opposition of this *Scheme* disgusted the whole Town.'<sup>157</sup>

Handel's workload probably eased after the two performances of *Esther* in the middle of April 1733. These were followed by repeat performances of *Orlando* and *Floridante* between 21 April and 19 May 1733. The season concluded with six performances of Bononcini's *Griselda* between 22 May and 9 June 1733. Bononcini's opera had been first performed by the Royal Academy in 1722, and perhaps Senesino had expressed an interest in performing it again. As with Ariosti's *Coriolano* the previous season, Handel was either inclined or persuaded to include a Royal Academy opera by one of his former colleagues.<sup>158</sup> Maybe the production required relatively little preparation: Handel was already concentrating on his next new oratorio *Athalia*, which he intended to perform at Oxford following an invitation to give concerts there during the 'Publick Act'. Handel's autograph score, completed on 7 June 1733, shows that the composer initially expected most of his Italian opera singers, including Senesino and Montagnana, to accompany him to Oxford.

However, on 2 June 1733 the *Bee* reported that 'We are credibly informed, that one Day last Week [Handel] sent a Message to Signior [sic] Senesino, the famous Italian Singer, acquainting Him that He had no farther Occasion for his Service.'<sup>159</sup> In fact, Senesino had been involved with the organisers of a new rival opera company since

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<sup>155</sup> Viscount Percival wrote in his diary on 27 March 1733 that *Deborah* 'was very magnificent, near a hundred performers' (*Deutsch*, p. 309).

<sup>156</sup> Subscribers' season tickets were made out of silver.

<sup>157</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 310-2.

<sup>158</sup> Burrows speculated that 'Pressure from the subscribers may also have been responsible ... this looks like a gesture on the part of Heidegger (and possibly Handel himself) in the face of growing opposition.' ('Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 152).

<sup>159</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 315-6.

January, and probably had no intention of remaining part of the Handel-Heidegger company.<sup>160</sup> Between the last performance of *Griselda* on 9 June and Handel's departure for Oxford in early July 1733, Senesino, Bertolli, and Montagnana defected to the organisation that would become known as 'The Opera of the Nobility'.<sup>161</sup> Milhous and Hume suggested that the singers were 'drawn by the prospect of escaping Handel's "tyranny" and by the lure of unrealistically high salaries', but that the ensuing rivalry 'divided such demand for opera as there was in London, and inevitably it made both enterprises ruinously unprofitable.'<sup>162</sup>

### Oxford Concert Series, July 1733<sup>163</sup>

**Table 2: Performances of Handel's Music at Oxford<sup>164</sup>**

Dates	Handel's concerts	Other
Thurs. 5	<i>Esther</i> (Sheldonian)	
Sat. 7		6 or 7 am: 'Musick Lecture' under the direction of Professor Richard Goodson included 'two or three' overtures
	Evening: <i>Esther</i> (Sheldonian)	
Sun. 8		Morning: <i>Utrecht Te Deum</i> + anthem (coronation anthem, or 'I will magnify thee' – possibly the Chapel Royal version). Directed by Walter Powell. St. Mary's Church
		Afternoon: <i>Utrecht Jubilate</i> + anthem. Directed by Powell. St. Mary's Church <sup>165</sup>
Tues. 10	<i>Athalia</i> (Sheldonian) <sup>166</sup>	
Wed. 11	9am: <i>Acis &amp; Galatea</i> (Christ Church Hall)	
	Evening: <i>Athalia</i> (Sheldonian)	
Thurs. 12	<i>Deborah</i> (Sheldonian)	

<sup>160</sup> Deutsch remarked that 'Since January 1733, or even earlier, Senesino had been in contact with the proposer of the Nobility Opera.' (Ibid., p. 316).

<sup>161</sup> 'At the time it was generally known as Senesino's Opera.' (Dean: Op. cit., p. 133, footnote 32).

<sup>162</sup> Op. cit., pp. 86-9.

<sup>163</sup> For a full account, see H. Diack Johnstone: 'Handel at Oxford in 1733' in *EM*, May 2003, pp. 248-59. The only specific study of Handel's visit to Oxford prior to Johnstone's recent article was Cyril A. Eland's unpublished typescript 'Handel's Visit to Oxford, A.D. 1733', probably written while Eland was an undergraduate at Magdalen College in Oxford. My discussion of Handel's visit to Oxford is based on Eland's typescript, now in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, but has benefited from Johnstone's article published during the writing of this thesis. I am also grateful to H. Diack Johnstone for further clarification of information via personal communication.

<sup>164</sup> Also see Appendix 1a: Figure 5.

<sup>165</sup> Johnstone also drew attention to an Evening service at New College featuring music by Blow and 'another Anthem with Instruments', but doubted that this anthem was also by Handel (Op. cit., p. 256).

<sup>166</sup> The première of *Athalia* was supposed to be on Monday 9 July, but it had to be postponed until the following day due to the academic ceremonies taking too long (Ibid., p. 257).



Handel was invited to Oxford in July 1733 to give a concert series in the Sheldonian Theatre during the University's 'Publick Act', which was a combination of ceremonial events, including the commemoration of the University's benefactors, and the awarding of masters of arts, doctorates, and honorary degrees. London newspapers claimed that Oxford had offered Handel an honorary doctorate,<sup>167</sup> and it is suspected that he had already refused the equivalent honour from Cambridge.<sup>168</sup> We can only speculate why he rejected Oxford's offer.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps an invitation from a university with notorious Jacobite sympathies offered to a composer with strong Hanoverian affiliations presented a situation full of political complexity.<sup>170</sup> It has been suggested that Racine's play *Athalie* was a direct response to James II's failed attempt to recover his throne,<sup>171</sup> and such an interpretation would surely have received enthusiastic support from Jacobites at Oxford. However, in Handel's oratorio the blatantly Jacobite connotation evident in restoring the rightful monarchy is incongruous to the plainly Hanoverian and pro-Protestant text 'Bless the true church, and save the King'. Similarly, Handel's Oxford performance of *Esther* featured the Hanoverian coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest* with Samuel Humphreys' subverted first line: 'God is our hope and he shall cause the king to shew mercy to Jacob's race'.<sup>172</sup> Such texts cannot have passed without comment from Oxford audiences with the Stuarts waiting and plotting

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<sup>167</sup> *Applebee's Original Weekly-Journal* of 7 April 1733, recycling an announcement which first appeared in *The Daily Advertiser* on 31 March 1733, reported 'We hear that the University of Oxford will present the celebrated Mr. Handel with the Degree of Doctor of Musick, at the Publick Act to beheld there this Summer, that Signor Senesino is expected to be present on that Occasion, and that an Oratorio would be perform'd in the Theatre there' (Johnstone: *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1).

<sup>168</sup> The offer of a doctorate from Cambridge is referred to in *The Craftsman*, 14 July 1733 (*Deutsch*, p. 326).

<sup>169</sup> It is attributed that Haydn complained that to obtain the doctorate at Oxford was far too expensive (Rosemary Hughes: *Haydn*, p. 74), but Johnstone observed that 'the combined costs of taking an Oxford B.Mus and D.Mus were then less than £5.' The theory that Handel was ineligible because he declined to undertake an exercise in composition is ridiculous because '*Athalia* would surely, if need be, have counted as such.' (p. 257). Perhaps Handel refused an honorary doctorate from Oxford because he did not wish to take part in a political game with Jacobites. Johnstone proposed that Handel 'had no wish to be placed in the same camp as his erstwhile friend Maurice Greene', who had been awarded both doctorate and honorary title of Professor of Music from Cambridge in July 1730. (pp. 251-2).

<sup>170</sup> Although the university had an image as a hotbed of Jacobitism, it is notable that it also sought the approval of the Hanoverian regime. Seven months after Handel's visit it gave a reception for Prince William of Orange (soon to marry Princess Anne) and awarded him an honorary doctorate (Burrows: *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 318)

<sup>171</sup> Racine: *Iphigenia / Phaedra / Athaliah*, ed. by John Cairncross, p. 231.

<sup>172</sup> Handel seems to have become aware of the 'Jacob's race' connotations in *Esther*, and altered the sentence to 'Blessed are all they that fear the Lord' in revivals during the 1740s and 1750s.



across the English Channel. But if *Esther* and *Athalia* possess a confusing entangling of Jacobite and Hanoverian subtexts, perhaps they manifest Handel's ability to make his work appeal to both parties.<sup>173</sup>

Irrespective of honorary degrees or politically sensitive issues, Handel's short concert series in Oxford was a valuable experiment without financial pressure that could be conducted away from London at precisely the time when he needed to reappraise his position in the capital's cultural life. Significantly, the short concert series at Oxford was the first time he attempted to perform a succession of works only in the English language. He began his Oxford programme with *Esther* on 5 July 1733. A pamphlet titled *The Oxford Act*, published in 1734, recounted that 'One of the Royal and Ample' members of Handel's audience 'had been saying, that truly, 'twas his Opinion, that the Theater was erected for other-guise Purposes, than to be prostituted to a Company of squeeking, bawling, outlandish Singsters.'<sup>174</sup> Not everybody was critical about Handel's activities in Oxford. On 7 July, prior to a repeat performance of *Esther*, Henry Baynbrigg Buckeridge of St. John's College read a poem entitled *Musica Sacra Dramatica, Sive Oratorium*,<sup>175</sup> which compared Handel's singers and each section of the orchestra to Heavenly impacts of thunder, and contained several references to the oratorio *Deborah* - which had not yet been performed in Oxford.

It is possible that the early morning lecture by Professor Richard Goodson on 7 July might have featured some form of contribution from Handel or his players,<sup>176</sup> although Hearne complained in his diary the following day that it had been 'a sham consort ... not a

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<sup>173</sup> The political content of Handel's oratorio librettos must be most directly attributed to the librettists rather than the composer. Handel's private political views are unknown. Although he appeared to be a loyal Hanoverian (e.g. his declining an invitation to Cardinal Colonna's residence when the Pretender was there in 1729), he regularly collaborated with the non-juror Charles Jennens, and associated with active Jacobites such as James Brydges (although the apparent lack of a direct relationship between Chandos and Handel after the 1710s supports the notion that the composer distanced himself from overtly Jacobite circles after he had acclimatised to English political life).

<sup>174</sup> Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 259.

<sup>175</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 320-2.

<sup>176</sup> Johnstone considers it unlikely that Handel or his players had any involvement with the event (Op. cit., p. 256), but noted that *The Oxford Act A.D. 1733*, published in 1734, refers to this lecture and suggests 'our old Friend *Handel*, and his Retinue' thought it worth their while 'to slam us off ... with two or three-common-Overtures'. *Deutsch* was aware of this pamphlet, but did not make full use of it.

soul was pleased',<sup>177</sup> although it is hardly surprising that neither musicians nor audience were at their best at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning.<sup>178</sup> Handel's music was also directed by the countertenor Walter Powell during services at St. Mary's Church on Sunday 8 July. Perhaps an Oxford source of the Chapel Royal version of 'I will magnify thee' (HWV 150b) that dates from the early 1730s originates from one of these services.<sup>179</sup>

The new oratorio *Athalia* was intended for Monday 9 July, but owing to the academic ceremonies in the Sheldonian taking too long, the performance had to be postponed until the following day. The *Norwich Gazette* of 14 July 1733 claimed that *Athalia* was 'performed by about 70 Voices and Instruments of Musick, and was the grandest ever heard at Oxford'.<sup>180</sup> This description compares favourably with Thomas Brett's comment that 'The Musick ... was very noble & affecting. There were above 50 performers.'<sup>181</sup> It was reported in the London newspaper *The Bee* that *Athalia* had been performed with 'the utmost applause'.<sup>182</sup> The following morning Handel performed *Acis and Galatea* at Christ Church Hall at 9 o'clock in the morning.<sup>183</sup> The composer's Oxford series concluded on Thursday 12 July with *Deborah*, his most recent large-scale English work to have been performed in London. Johnstone evaluated that 'on Friday, 13 July, ... Mr Handel and his 'lousy crew' must have headed back to town, exhausted no doubt, but also elated by the overwhelming success of their Oxonian adventure.'<sup>184</sup>

On 21 July 1733 the *Norwich Gazette* reported 'It is computed that the famous Mr. Handell cleared by his Musick at Oxford upwards of £2000.'<sup>185</sup> It is possible that the

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<sup>177</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 323.

<sup>178</sup> Johnstone: Op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256 (this suggestion was made to Johnstone by Donald Burrows). Since publishing his article, Johnstone has come to believe that Handel and his musicians performed in the church services (personal communication).

<sup>180</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 327.

<sup>181</sup> Letter dated 3/14 September 1733 (Johnstone: Op. cit., p. 252).

<sup>182</sup> 14 July 1733 (*Deutsch*, pp. 326-7).

<sup>183</sup> Johnstone suggested that the morning performance of *Acis and Galatea* at Christ Church Hall 'was probably a last-minute arrangement designed to compensate the musicians for the loss of revenue' from the cancelled performance of *Athalia* on Monday (Op. cit., p. 257). It is possible that some music was sung in Italian, but Handel seems to have reverted to English for several texts (Dean: Op. cit., p. 175).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 328.



financial success of Handel's visit to Oxford was exaggerated,<sup>186</sup> but the trip certainly benefited the composer. He successfully produced a concert series of English music theatre works for the first time, without requiring most of the famous Italian singers who had recently defected to form the Opera of the Nobility. The opportunity to compose *Athalia* provided Handel with his 'first great English oratorio',<sup>187</sup> and it is suspected that Charles Jennens and Thomas Morell were both at Oxford in July 1733.<sup>188</sup> Their possible attendance at some of Handel's Oxford performances might have directly influenced their future libretto collaborations with Handel.

### King's Theatre, 1733-4

The 1733-4 season was the last of Handel's five-year tenure at the King's Theatre, and the first in which Handel was competing against the Opera of the Nobility.<sup>189</sup> Strohm described that the 'new enterprise was naturally joined not only by those aristocratic opera-lovers who, like Burlington, had no longer patronised Handel after 1720, but also by others who had still supported him after 1729.'<sup>190</sup> The principal patron of the Opera of the Nobility was Frederick, the Prince of Wales, but Robert D. Hume has proved that 'the long-standing idea that Frederick was a die-hard opponent of Handel cannot be sustained'.<sup>191</sup> Frederick frequently subscribed to Handel's opera company, paying them the exact same sum of £250 that he annually donated to the 'Opera of the Nobility'. Furthermore, in April 1736 Handel produced *Atalanta* as part of the public celebrations of Frederick's marriage to Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, and also composed the anthem

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<sup>186</sup> It is difficult to explain why Handel did not repeat the experience if he had made such a large profit.

<sup>187</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>188</sup> I am grateful to Leslie Robarts for this information (personal communication).

<sup>189</sup> Strohm described Handel's rivals as 'an organisation which by its very name reveals the fact that the problem of opera in London was a social one. The founders must have regarded the name as a pleonasm, since for them Italian opera was in any case a privilege of the nobility, who had in fact financed Handel and Heidegger even after 1729, both men being given freedom of activity only reluctantly.' ('Handel and his Italian opera texts', pp. 66-8).

<sup>190</sup> Op. cit., pp. 66-8. For a reliable explanation of the formation of the Opera of the Nobility, see Thomas McGeary: 'Handel, Prince Frederick, and the Opera of the Nobility Reconsidered' in *GHB VII*, or Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s' in *GHB X*.

<sup>191</sup> 'Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', p. 359.

*Sing unto God* performed at their wedding. Like other patrons of the Opera of the Nobility, the Prince of Wales had no personal difficulty in appreciating and financially supporting Handel's music too.

Popular perception of the rivalry between Handel and the Opera of the Nobility has been influenced by the confused determination (and artistic licence) of biographers and filmmakers who portray Handel as an abandoned genius struggling to match the fickle aristocracy's alleged desire for more trivial and fashionable entertainment.<sup>192</sup> Although some of Handel's ventures were unsuccessful, it is important to note that both companies were afflicted with expensive failures. It is certain that the competition provoked aggressive decision-making: Handel opened his 1733-4 season on 30 October 1733, in order to attract the attention of the London opera audiences two months earlier than the opening of the Opera of the Nobility.<sup>193</sup> Handel did not elect to open with a major work of his own, but instead with the pasticcio *Semiramide*. All previous Second Academy seasons had featured one or two pasticcios, but the first few months of the 1733-4 season were dominated by an unusually large number of pasticcios. 80 per cent of Handel's performances between 30 October 1733 and 26 January 1734 were based on the works of other composers. *Semiramide* featured arias by Vinci, *Caio Fabricio* offered music by Hasse, and Vinci was represented again in *Arbace*. This was probably a strategy by Handel to feature modern fashionable composers in order to pre-empt the stylistic competition from the Opera of the Nobility's Neapolitan music director Nicola Porpora.<sup>194</sup> It is also

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<sup>192</sup> Newman Flower's description of Handel's rivalry with the 'Opera of the Nobility' is an enchanting fairy tale with little resemblance to historical evidence (*George Frideric Handel: His Personality and His Times*, pp. 214-5). This is typified by Flower's claim that the sole mission of 'these titled backers, who lacked a single note of music between them ... was to destroy Handel' (p. 220). Likewise, Gérard Corbiau's film *Farinelli: Il Castrato* (1994, France) represents Handel during this period suffering from compositional block and playing to empty houses.

<sup>193</sup> Burrows remarked that Handel opening his season earlier than his competitors 'enabled him to present performances when the Prince of Orange arrived in London for his marriage with Princess Anne' ('Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 154).

<sup>194</sup> Strohm proposed that 'it was not [Handel's] own work but the pasticcios that were to provide the answer to his rivals. He wanted to confront Porpora with superior examples of Porpora's own kind of music.' ('Handel's pasticcios', pp. 182-3).



possible that Handel wished to capitalize upon the relative success that operas by other composers had attracted during the previous season.

Among Handel's opening four productions mounted in the 1733-4 season, only a revival of *Ottone* was an example of his own work,<sup>195</sup> but this was rearranged to allow his new castrato Carestini to insert some arias that he had brought with him from Italy.<sup>196</sup> None of the projects was particularly successful. Each received only four performances, apart from *Arbace*, which managed double that number. Handel's new opera *Arianna in Creta* provided some much needed stability with sixteen performances during the middle of an otherwise difficult season. Handel's other new work was *Parnasso in Festa*, a *festa teatrale* celebrating the wedding of Princess Anne to Willem, Prince of Orange on 14 March 1734.<sup>197</sup> Handel's score featured some substantial new music mingled with material adapted from *Athalia*, which had not yet been heard in London. *Parnasso in Festa* was performed only four times, but perhaps Handel did not plan for it to outlive the wedding festivities. It is plausible that *Parnasso in Festa* influenced Handel's decision to revise *Athalia* for London the following season.

Maybe Handel hoped to attract or retain audiences by continuing to offer the novelty of English works such as *Deborah* and *Acis and Galatea*, although my research led me to the conclusion that *Deborah* was presented in a bilingual version in 1734. On 27 April 1734 Handel revived *Sosarme*, a successful opera when first performed only two seasons earlier. Mrs. Pendarves, who had attended the dress rehearsal the previous morning, eagerly reported that she would 'not be able to resist the temptation of it.' However, the revived *Sosarme* ran for only three performances. On 30 April Mrs. Pendarves wrote again: 'I go to-night to ... Sosarmes, an opera of Mr. Handel's, a

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<sup>195</sup> Curiously, this might have given the Opera of the Nobility the idea to produce its own pasticcio of Handel's *Ottone* on 10 December 1734. This is the only known example of Farinelli singing in a Handel opera, although he did not sing any of the arias Handel had originally composed for the role of Adelberto (Dean & Knapp: Op. cit., p. 441).

<sup>196</sup> Strohm: Op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>197</sup> The Opera of the Nobility also contributed to the festivities with Porpora's oratorio *Davide e Bersabea*.

charming one, and yet I dare say it will be almost empty! 'Tis vexatious to have *such music* neglected.'<sup>198</sup>

Handel fared better with *Il Pastor Fido* (HWV 8c), revived on 18 May with a considerably expanded score featuring additional choruses for Shepherds, Hunters, and Priests preparing a sacrifice. Several arias were added for Carestini; Handel borrowed complete movements or re-composed musical material taken from *Ezio*, *Riccardo Primo*, *Parnasso in Festa*, *Rodelinda*, *Lotario*, *Partenope*, *Teseo*, and *The Water Music*.<sup>199</sup> The revised version received thirteen performances - an exceptionally high number for a revival - and was much more popular than the original version first performed on 24 October 1712 (which had run for only six performances).

Burrows wrote that 'In spite of the competition, Handel had run a full season', and observed that the sustained runs of *Arianna in Creta* and *Il Pastor Fido* were vital contributory factors to the survival of Handel and Heidegger's opera company.<sup>200</sup> The fact that Handel's season began first and ended last might have arisen from the composer's sheer stubbornness. It must be borne in mind that the number of performances does not inform us how large the audiences were or give a reliable idea of how many tickets were sold, but there is no substantial evidence that Handel's audience deserted him for the Opera of the Nobility. However, it is evident that some of Handel's supporters attended performances at the rival company: Mrs. Pendarves wrote that her brother Bernard Granville had gone to hear Hasse's *Siroe* at the Haymarket, and mentioned that 'With this band of singers and dull Italian operas, such as you almost fall asleep at, *they presume* to rival Handel'. While Mrs. Pendarves's assessment may or may not reflect Bernard Granville's own opinion directly, and might be formulated from personal taste - perhaps outright prejudice - in Handel's favour, it suggests that even the most ardent supporters of

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<sup>198</sup> Both letters reprinted in *Deutsch*, p. 364.

<sup>199</sup> *HHB* Vol.1, p. 127. The May 1734 version of *Il Pastor Fido* features so many alterations that it could be regarded as entirely distinct from the 1712 score. For a summary of Handel's changes see Dean and Knapp, *Op. cit.*, pp. 218-9.

<sup>200</sup> *Handel*, p. 179.



Handel attended the Opera of the Nobility occasionally, spent some time discussing its merits or flaws, and yet did not desert Handel.<sup>201</sup>

In 1955 Deutsch remarked that ‘two opera houses were too much for London’,<sup>202</sup> yet a letter discovered in 1990 demonstrates that Deutsch’s retrospective assessment had been anticipated at the time. Before the Opera of the Nobility had even commenced their season,<sup>203</sup> Charles Jennens wrote to John Ludford on 13 December 1733: ‘How two Opera Houses will subsist after Christmas, I can’t tell; but at present we are at some difficulty for the Support of One; & Mr. Handel has been forc’d to drop his Opera three nights for want of company.’<sup>204</sup> It was inevitable that audiences would be spread too thinly between the Opera of the Nobility and the Handel’s company for either enterprise to flourish.

### Covent Garden, 1734-5

The rivalry continued into the next season. After the expiry of Handel’s five-year tenure, the King’s Theatre moved into the hands of the Opera of the Nobility, who probably represented the legitimate claim to continuing the Royal Academy of Music’s charter in the eyes of the public, not least owing to the involvement of Senesino and Cuzzoni. Dean assessed that there can be no doubt that ‘as soon as Handel’s five years were up, they made haste to get rid of him and repossess the theatre. Perhaps they expected him to retire. If so, they misjudged his character. He immediately looked for another theatre.’<sup>205</sup> Handel must have realized that the five-year agreement was not going to be renewed, and already made his arrangements in advance of the alleged crisis. Within a week of the end of the 1733-4 season, the *London Evening Post* reported: ‘We hear that the Town will be entertained next

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<sup>201</sup> Letter dated 27 November 1736 (*Deutsch*, p. 418).

<sup>202</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 364.

<sup>203</sup> Porpora’s *Arianna in Nasso* opened on 29 December 1733.

<sup>204</sup> Anthony Hicks: ‘A New Letter of Charles Jennens’ in *GHB IV*, 1991, p. 155. Handel cancelled six opera performances between 27 November 1733 and 2 January 1734 (Dean: *Handel’s Operas 1726-1741*, p. 133, footnote 35).

<sup>205</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 274.

Season with an Opera at the Haymarket and with another under the direction of Mr. Handel (twice a week) at the New Theatre in Covent-Garden'.<sup>206</sup>

Handel's company, no longer in any way describable as the Second Academy, moved to John Rich's new theatre at Covent Garden. Dean regarded this as 'an obvious choice. It was London's newest theatre, open for less than two years, perhaps larger than Lincoln's Inn Fields and the Little Haymarket and better equipped for staging opera.'<sup>207</sup>

Burrows assessed:

Handel certainly had to adapt to different circumstances because, while the twice-weekly ... opera nights (and rehearsals) had to be fitted into the busy daily schedule of a regular repertory theatre. In some way Handel and Rich must have covered both the costs of the theatre and compensation to actors who were prevented from performing on Handel's nights ... Handel perhaps also faced a challenge in assembling an orchestra comparable to that at the King's Theatre.<sup>208</sup>

The exact nature of the agreement between Rich and Handel is unknown, but has been the subject of informative essays by Robert D. Hume<sup>209</sup> and Sarah McCleave.<sup>210</sup> Burrows observed that 'every one of Handel's 56 performances this season was advertised as being by royal command'. This could have indicated the King and Queen's 'partisan support', but it might also have been a peculiar legal trick employed to 'demonstrate the legitimacy

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<sup>206</sup> Issue dated 11 July 1734, quoted in Sarah McCleave: 'Dancing at the English Opera: Marie Sallé's Letter to the Duchess of Richmond', p. 28.

<sup>207</sup> Op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>208</sup> 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 155. Burrows also noted that 'while the Nobility continued with the Tuesday / Saturday pattern, Handel's regular second night was Wednesday, perhaps an accidental consequence of the need to fit round the actors' schedules at Covent Garden rather than a deliberate policy of presenting performances on a different night.' (Ibid., p. 156).

<sup>209</sup> In 'Handel and opera management in the 1730s', Hume demonstrated that many of the accepted stories surrounding Handel's departure from the King's Theatre and his rivalry with the 'Opera of the Nobility' are over-exaggerated and apocryphal.

<sup>210</sup> McCleave suggested that Rich actively supported Handel: 'Not only did Rich rent Covent Garden to the composer, but his company used Lincoln's Inn Fields only rarely on Handel's opera nights, thus suggesting that Rich was deliberately refraining from providing competition' (Op. cit., p. 26).



of Handel's opera performances when they took place at a venue other than the King's Theatre.'<sup>211</sup>

Handel was now fully independent for the first time in his career, from both the Haymarket impresario Heidegger and the shadowy administrative after-effects of the enigmatic Royal Academy of Music. McCleave suggested that Handel's partnership with Rich was a direct response to the latter's constructive criticism of Italian opera included in his dedication to *The Rape of Proserpine*:

Though my inclination to Musick frequently leads me to visit the *Italian* Opera ... there are many essential Requisites still wanting, to establish that Entertainment on a lasting Foundation, and adapt it to the Taste of an *English* Audience ... it is evident, that the vast Expence of procuring foreign Voices, does necessarily exclude those various Embellishments of Machinery, Painting, Dances, as well as Poetry itself, which have been always esteemed (except till very lately in *England*) Auxiliaries absolutely necessary to the Success of Musick; and without which, it cannot be long supported, unless by very great Subscriptions, of which we naturally grow tired in a few Years. It seems, therefore, the only Way by which Musick can be establish'd in England, is to give it those Assistances from other Arts which it yet wants, and by that Means to adapt it still more to the Publick Taste; to moderate, as much as possible, the Expence of it, and thereby to make it a general Diversion, which hitherto it has not been.<sup>212</sup>

It appears that Handel took Rich's advice by making use of three notable artistic opportunities at Covent Garden. Firstly, the English singers John Beard and Cecilia Young both became important members of the Italian opera company, suggesting that Handel give fledgling English voices an apprenticeship alongside the finest Italians. Secondly, the

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<sup>211</sup> Op. cit., pp. 156-7.

<sup>212</sup> John Rich's dedication in the wordbook of *The Rape of Proserpine*, printed by Thomas Wood, 1727 (Ibid., pp. 26-7). Dean remarked that Rich 'may have had the English semi-opera in mind.' (Op. cit., p. 275).

composer used Covent Garden's theatre chorus in his Italian operas during the 1734-5 season: although this was unusual for operas in early eighteenth-century London, it was a natural development from Handel's use of choruses in *Parnasso in Festa* and *Il Pastor Fido* during the last half of the previous season. Thirdly, he incorporated prominent use of dancers into both revived and new operas this season owing to the availability of the celebrated French dancer Marie Sallé and her ballet company.<sup>213</sup> These were opportunities for him to offer unique novelties that the competition lacked.<sup>214</sup> In a forthcoming book, Sarah McCleave judges that musicologists have seriously overlooked the extent to which dance featured in early eighteenth-century London operas.<sup>215</sup> An eyewitness reported that entr'acte dances occurred in Handel's operas during the 1732-3 King's Theatre season, and it is possible that dancers featured regularly during other seasons for which no documentary evidence has been identified.<sup>216</sup> Although dance may have been a greater part of Handel's London opera performances than hitherto realized, an official collaboration for an entire season with a highly esteemed dance company permitted Handel to expand the aesthetic parameters of his music dramas.

Marie Sallé was one of the most famous ballerinas in Europe, and renowned for her ability as an innovative artist. Her first known public appearance was at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in London on 18 October 1716, and her first connection with Handel might have been an invitation to dance in the 1717 revival of *Rinaldo*. Sallé then spent the next decade or so alternating between projects in Paris and London. John Rich engaged Sallé to perform at his new theatre in the 1733-4 season,<sup>217</sup> during which she developed two highly

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<sup>213</sup> Sarah McCleave suggests that all of Handel's 1734-5 season was prepared with the availability of the Covent Garden dance troupe firmly in mind (personal communication).

<sup>214</sup> 'For his part Handel doubtless welcomed the opportunity to widen the scope of *opera seria*'. (Dean: Op. cit., pp. 275-6).

<sup>215</sup> McCleave kindly allowed me to read a polished draft of Chapter 3 in *Dance in Opera: Handel on the London Stage* (forthcoming), and has made useful observations to me in personal communication.

<sup>216</sup> Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Pöllnitz's diary entry dated 3 May 1733, in *HHB* Vol. 4, p. 214.

<sup>217</sup> Sallé was engaged by Rich for the theatre, rather than by Handel exclusively for his own operas, but McCleave observed that Sallé clearly disliked Rich after having had problems with him while working at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre between 1725 and 1727. McCleave speculated that Sallé may have returned to Rich only because she suspected Handel would be setting up an opera company at Covent Garden in autumn 1734 (Op. cit., p. 24).



innovative dance entertainments: '*Pygmalion* ... vividly recounting the sculptor's adoring 'examination and observation of a lovely statue's contours ... [and] *Bacchus and Ariadne*, [which] was even more daring'. Sallé was compared to the most famous actresses of the day.<sup>218</sup> One presumes that Handel was pleased to renew his collaboration with Sallé during the 1734-5 season, but one of their collaborations illustrates the unpredictable fickleness of London audiences: Sallé's performance as Cupid during a ballet in *Alcina* was hissed on one occasion, yet apparently on another evening the same dance received an encore. Handel and Sallé's ballet scenes often had narrative qualities, such as the dance sequence that Handel considered using in both *Ariodante* and *Alcina*: the prima donna, after a grand soliloquy at the end of Act II, is alternately comforted and disturbed by the fusion of dance and music evoking the contrast between agreeable and disagreeable dreams. Handel and Sallé's collaboration reached its peak with *Terpsicore*, a prologue added to the November 1734 revival of *Il Pastor Fido*. Sallé, dressed as the Muse of Dance, depicted various passions. Dances were not included in the English oratorios performed during spring 1735, but Sallé was a significant asset to Handel's operas during the 1734-5 season. The combination of dance and an established chorus offered a style of integrated dramatic presentation that the Opera of the Nobility could not have foreseen or matched. McCleave proposed that:

Perhaps, rather than being ungraciously abandoned by Heidegger, Handel had planned in advance to join Rich at Covent Garden in order to avail himself of the dancers and chorus which Rich could provide ... Indeed, the Covent Garden collaboration of 1734-5 should be seen as a positive and exciting endeavour which reflected the tastes and interests of two supremely talented artists, a wily theatrical manager, and some personages of considerable political and financial standing.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> McCleave: 'Sallé' in *NG*.

<sup>219</sup> McCleave: 'Dancing at the English Opera', pp. 36-7.

During his first season at Covent Garden, Handel made a concerted effort to combat the novelty of his rivals with unparalleled artistic quality and a diversity of genres. The formula (two entirely new works and a batch of assorted revivals) conforms to the Second Academy model, although the quality of Handel's new works *Ariodante* and *Alcina* was almost unique.<sup>220</sup> It was also during this season that Handel introduced organ concertos into his oratorio performances,<sup>221</sup> which could have been another conscious strategy to compete with the Opera of the Nobility's celebrated attraction Farinelli.<sup>222</sup> The structure of the season implies that Handel adopted a coherently planned strategy divided into five parts. Some aspects of this five-part pattern can be traced in other seasons that Handel produced during the 1730s, but it also contains several major innovations, and possesses an exceptional clarity and balance that implies that it may have been planned with especially great care:

1. A repeat of the two most popular works from the previous season, but in new versions.
2. A self-pasticcio entirely consisting of Handel's own music.
3. The customary new 'hit' opera mounted in mid-season, after Christmas.
4. A distinct cluster of English works in spring.
5. A spectacular new opera to conclude the season with a flourish.<sup>223</sup>

Handel's first Covent Garden season opened with the unprecedented method of mounting the previous season's two most successful works in expanded revisions. This is the only example of such an inauguration tactic within the scope of this thesis. A major factor behind Handel's decision to revive *Il Pastor Fido* and *Arianna in Creta* might have been that he did not require much time to revise them, but perhaps there were also other

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<sup>220</sup> The only similar example during Handel's opera career is the 1724-5 season when he composed *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* for the same cast.

<sup>221</sup> Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 156.

<sup>222</sup> I thank Graham Cummings for making this observation to me (personal communication).

<sup>223</sup> *Atalanta* fulfills a similar purpose in the 1735-6 season, although that is probably coincidental.



practical and aesthetic considerations: it may have seemed wise for Handel to continue his fight with the Opera of the Nobility by reviving his most popular weapons against them while they were still relatively fresh. They were also the most appropriate recent operas in which special opportunities could be created for Sallé and her ballet company.<sup>224</sup> *Il Pastor Fido* (with *Terpsicore*) was produced on 9 November 1734.<sup>225</sup> It was performed five times, which seems to have been an average number for Handel's revivals during the first half of the 1730s. This was followed on 27 November 1734 by a reorganized version of *Arianna in Creta*, only ten months after it had been first produced. This also received five performances.

Although each Second Academy season included a pasticcio, Handel adjusted this policy for his first season at Covent Garden: *Oreste* was modelled on a libretto by Giuseppe Barlocchi (Rome, 1723), and contains only Handel's own music. It is peculiar that Handel departed from his usual pasticcio method when he had previously seemed content to use arias by Vinci, Leo and Hasse. Perhaps the abundance of pasticcios in previous seasons had depleted the appropriate contents of Handel's music library, or maybe Handel had become either uninterested in or unwilling to produce pasticcios adapted from the works of other composers. For reasons that might have been either artistic or pragmatic (or both), Handel instead decided to recycle arias taken from operas ranging from those never heard in England (*Agrippina*) to quite recent Second Academy works (*Lotario*, *Partenope*, *Sosarme*, and even *Arianna*).<sup>226</sup> Although a pasticcio in method, *Oreste* is no less dramatically effective than 'original' Handel operas that contain high proportions of self-borrowing (such as *Rinaldo*). Strohm hypothesised that *Oreste* 'may have been an experiment from which the composer hoped to discover how much the choice of a

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<sup>224</sup> Other Second Academy dramas such as the Metastasian operas *Porro* and *Ezio* would have probably been less conducive to inserted dances.

<sup>225</sup> For a discussion about *Terpsicore*, see McCleave: 'Handel's unpublished dance music' in *GHB VI*, 1996.

<sup>226</sup> The *HHA* score of *Oreste* (edited by Bernd Baselt) contains a comprehensive list of sources.

classical-mythological subject would assist him in the present dispute with the 'Opera of the Nobility'. It may also have been no more than a stop-gap in the season's repertory.'<sup>227</sup>

Handel completed the composition of *Ariodante* on 31 October 1734 prior to the commencement of the season, but reserved its performance until 8 January 1735. It was performed eleven times.<sup>228</sup> The fledgling tradition of performing English works each spring was consolidated during March and April 1735. The Opera of the Nobility did not compete directly with English oratorio,<sup>229</sup> so Handel was consequently able to exploit an advantage over his rivals, and presented a mini-series of the three English oratorios he had composed up to that date, although all of them were presented in bilingual versions.<sup>230</sup>

The season concluded with *Alcina*. One of the greatest triumphs of Handel's career, *Alcina* was performed eighteen times during its first run: a higher number than any other new work that falls within the scope of this thesis. Although *Ariodante* and *Alcina* are dissimilar librettos, both were based on stories from Ludovico Ariosto's epic poem *Orlando Furioso*. The source libretto on which Handel's *Alcina* is based was the anonymous *L'isola di Alcina*, first set to music by Riccardo Broschi, Farinelli's brother, for Rome in 1728. Ironically, Handel used his setting of *Alcina* to crown his most successful season yet during the period of his rivalry with Farinelli and the Opera of the Nobility. Burney wrote that *Alcina* was 'an opera with which Handel seems to have vanquished his opponents'.<sup>231</sup> Although the Opera of the Nobility's production of Hasse's *Artaserse*, featuring insertions by Broschi and Porpora, had been a tremendous success earlier in the season with 'more than 30 performances'<sup>232</sup>, they were now experiencing problems: the

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<sup>227</sup> Strohm: 'Handel and his Italian opera texts', Op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>228</sup> Dean considered eleven performances of *Ariodante* 'must be accounted a failure' (Op. cit., p. 277), but this seems an unduly harsh verdict.

<sup>229</sup> However, they did attempt to compete by producing Italian oratorio at the King's Theatre. Porpora's *David* was performed six times during its first run at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1734, but ran for only three performances during Lent 1735 (28 February, 1 April and 3 April), the last two in direct competition with Handel's first London performances of *Athalia*. Burney claimed that *David* 'seems to have sunk under his antagonist's superior force and fire' (*A General History of Music*, p. 792).

<sup>230</sup> See the relevant case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, and Burrows: 'Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*' in *Music in Eighteenth-Century Britain*.

<sup>231</sup> Op. cit., pp. 792-3.

<sup>232</sup> Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 156.



Earl of Egmont wrote in his diary on 6 May 1735: 'In the evening I went to the opera called *Iphigenia*, composed by Porpora, and I think the town does not justice in condemning it.'<sup>233</sup> Maybe the condemnation of 'the town' was a reference to negative criticism of the Porpora's music, but it is equally plausible that Egmont implied low attendance at this particular performance.<sup>234</sup>

The most notable impression we can receive about Handel's 1734-5 season is that he achieved a perfect synthesis of diverse theatrical subjects: pastoral (*Il Pastor Fido*), classical mythological (*Arianna* and *Oreste*), serious opera (*Ariodante*), biblical (the three English oratorios), and magical (*Alcina*), with the added musical feature of organ concertos. Burrows remarked that 'In terms of musical variety and quality, the 56 performances of Handel's 1734-5 Covent Garden Season constitute one of the most attractive seasons he ever mounted in London.'<sup>235</sup>

### Covent Garden, 1736

We do not know why Handel did not commence a full opera season in autumn 1735. Instead, he presented a short season that commenced in February 1736;<sup>236</sup> it is likely that the delay was enforced by Carestini's return to Italy and the unavailability of a suitable replacement.<sup>237</sup> Burrows observed:

it seems that in the light of later events that Handel had a plan ... Once the main opera seasons were over on the Continent, the singers would be free to come to London and he might then manage a short run of operas, after Easter 1736. In the meantime, the best that could be done was to perform English oratorio-type works with such singers as were to hand. Handel was probably sceptical about the number

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<sup>233</sup> A. H. Scouten: *The London Stage*, Part 3: 1729-1747, p. 488.

<sup>234</sup> The Earl of Egmont was another opera patron who supported both houses to a certain extent: he wrote in his diary on 29 January 1734 that he had attended Handel's *Arianna* (*Deutsch*, p. 343).

<sup>235</sup> *Handel*, pp. 183-6.

<sup>236</sup> See Appendix 1a Figure 8.

<sup>237</sup> On 10 July 1735 *The London Daily Post* reported 'Yesterday Signor Carestina [sic], a celebrated Singer in the late Opera's in Covent Garden Theatre, embarked on Board a Ship for Venice' (*Deutsch*, p. 392).

of performances that an all-English repertory could sustain, so it was prudent to begin late, not long before Lent, and to treat the English works as a run-in to the operas.<sup>238</sup>

The condensed 1736 season is a significant chronological milestone: it was Handel's first attempt to present a high percentage of English works in a London theatre,<sup>239</sup> none of them in bilingual versions. Dean summarised that 'Though freed from competition, the Nobility failed to profit.'<sup>240</sup> Internal political problems and petty disputes began to take their toll on the Opera of the Nobility, and it seems that the directors desperately sought reconciliation with Handel during the winter of 1735-6. When this failed, they sought to engage Hasse and his wife Faustina to revive their fortunes, but apparently Hasse 'refused to compete against Handel.'<sup>241</sup>

If Handel's supporters lamented the lack of operas, he provided generous compensation by eventually opening his season with the new ode *Alexander's Feast* on 19 February 1736. Handel used Newburgh Hamilton's arrangement of Dryden's 'The Power of Musick' for his first setting of verses by a major English poet.<sup>242</sup> The ode describes the manipulative power of the minstrel Timotheus over the psychotic Alexander the Great, and concludes that St. Cecilia's power is greater still due to her essentially spiritually uplifting virtue. The subject matter was ideal for Handel, who brilliantly responded to a text specifically conveying how music may invoke an extensive variety of passions. A significant practical advantage of Handel's first version of *Alexander's Feast* was that it required only three soloists.<sup>243</sup> However, the ode also had maximum scope for musical opulence due to several prominent insertions that were thematically related to its literary

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<sup>238</sup> Op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>239</sup> Nine performances of three English works in contrast to ten performances of two Italian operas.

<sup>240</sup> Op. cit., p. 279.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> The extent of Alexander Pope's contribution to the earlier works *Acis and Galatea* and *Esther* is unknown, and might have been minimal.

<sup>243</sup> Strada (soprano), Beard (tenor), and Erard (bass); although there was also one air for Cecilia Young (Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', p. 158 footnote 31).



concept.<sup>244</sup> Handel soon came to be publicly acknowledged as a latter-day Timotheus in his own right.<sup>245</sup> *Alexander's Feast* was performed only five times before *Acis and Galatea* was revived on 24 March 1736, but the frequent inclusion of the ode in subsequent seasons testifies to its success.<sup>246</sup>

The revivals of *Acis and Galatea* and *Esther* both received two performances. Although Handel's soloists were capable of singing in English without difficulty, a recently re-discovered libretto dated 1736 proves that *Acis and Galatea* was given in a bilingual version, in which Beard, Strada, Erard and Savage all sang Italian arias.<sup>247</sup> However, there is no evidence to contradict the likelihood that *Esther* was sung in an all-English version.

Handel's resumption of Italian opera performances was imminent. On 13 April, shortly before the last performance of *Esther*, the *London Daily Post* reported 'We hear that Signior Conti, who is esteemed the best Singer in Italy, being sent for by Mr. Handell, is expected here in a few days.'<sup>248</sup> On 15 April 1736 the *Old Whig* reported 'We hear that Mr. Handel has engag'd several of the finest Singers in Italy, and that they are expected here next Week, in order to perform eight Operas'.<sup>249</sup> It is not known precisely what the sum of 'eight operas' refers to. It may be an inaccurate rumour based on unfounded gossip,

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<sup>244</sup> The 1736 first version of *Alexander's Feast* featured a new concerto grosso (HWV 318), the new Italian cantata *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* (HWV 89), the 'Harp' concerto (Op. 4 no. 6) conveying Timotheus's lyre, and an organ concerto (Op. 4 no. 1) anticipating the triumph of the godly St. Cecilia over the paganistic Timotheus. Unlike Handel's use of organ concertos in other oratorio performances from 1735 onwards, the extra music used with *Alexander's Feast* has direct relevance to the literary concept. The revival of *Alexander's Feast* in November 1739 continued this pattern with the insertion of Handel's new *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* (also on a text by Dryden). The 1751 revival broke tradition by incorporating the non-Cecilian ode *The Choice of Hercules*, which Handel adapted from unused incidental music for Tobias Smollett's abandoned play *Alceste*.

<sup>245</sup> This was typified by Roubiliac's life-size statue of Handel, portraying the composer leaning upon a score of *Alexander's Feast*. It was unveiled at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens on 1 May 1738, but probably commenced much earlier in summer 1737. Apparently 'Handel's contemporaries saw the statue as representing him in the character of Apollo, or, more usually, that of Orpheus' (Jacob Simon (ed.): *Handel: A Celebration of his Life and Times*, p. 39).

<sup>246</sup> Handel was pleased with *Alexander's Feast*. The Earl of Shaftesbury informed James Harris that he had visited the composer shortly after the composition was finished: 'Handel was in high spirits & I think never play'd & sung so well[;] he play'd over almost his whole new peice which is not yet transcrib'd from his own hand ... Handel was so eager to play over his piece to me I had hardly any discourse with him.' Letter dated 24 January 1736, in Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>247</sup> Anthony Hicks: 'Acis and Galatea in 1736' in *The Handel Institute Newsletter*, spring 2004.

<sup>248</sup> Deutsch, p. 404.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

or, alternatively, it might refer to the number of opera performances Handel expected to give between the end of April and the close of the season in June 1736. If so, then this expectation was exceeded. However, it is also possible that the reference to ‘eight operas’ related to the number of Italian opera projects Handel would mount with this particular cast. The sum of different Handel operas produced at the end of the makeshift 1736 season and during the subsequent 1736-7 season is the exact figure cited in the *Old Whig*.<sup>250</sup>

On 22 April 1736 Handel completed his compositional draft of *Atalanta*. The opera was intended to be a celebration of the Prince of Wales’s marriage to the Princess of Saxe-Gotha, and based on ‘a subject that had been used in Germany at the time of court celebrations.’<sup>251</sup> Dean proposed that Handel ‘had more than one motive: as a royal composer to celebrate a public event, and to win back the Prince’s favour.’<sup>252</sup> However, the wedding service, featuring Handel’s new anthem *Sing unto God* (HWV 263), was ‘solemnized sooner than was expected’<sup>253</sup> on 27 April 1736. *Atalanta* was not yet ready for performance, so Handel produced a hastily revised version of *Ariodante* on 5 May 1736. Handel allowed Conti to substitute seven arias from his own repertory for the music he had originally composed for the lower-voiced Carestini. The Earl of Shaftesbury attended the revival of *Ariodante*. He noted that the only music Conti sung by Handel was a duet with Strada, but he ‘never was so delighted with any duet I ever heard in my life’, and was impressed with the new castrato:

he is all things consider’d the best singer I ever heard ... he will still improve very much for he is but nineteen years old ... His voice is perfectly clear[,] he swells a noate as full as Farinelli[;] he does not yet go quite as low as he (Farinelli), but his tone of voice is certainly sweeter & he has a greater command of it than Farinelli.

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<sup>250</sup> *Ariodante* (May 1736), *Atalanta* (May-June 1736 and November 1736), *Alcina* (November 1736 and June 1737), *Porro* (December 1736-January 1737), *Arminio* (January 1737), *Partenope* (January-February 1737), *Giustino* (May and June 1737) and *Berenice* (May and June 1737). However, this excludes the pasticcio *Didone*, oratorios, *Alexander’s Feast*, and a revival of the serenata *Parnasso in Festa*.

<sup>251</sup> Burrows: *Handel*, pp.118-9.

<sup>252</sup> Op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>253</sup> *London Daily Post*, 29 April 1736 (*Deutsch*, p. 405).



Conti's execution is inimitable & his voice goes the musicians tell me thorowly sound & sweet, as far as A in Alte & he can reach B or C though not so truely & distinct.<sup>254</sup>

*Ariodante* was performed only twice in May 1736. Its revival was probably only intended to be temporary while *Atalanta* was being prepared by 'great Numbers of Artificers, as Carpenters, Painters, Engineers, &c ... employed to ... bring it on the Stage with the utmost Expedition'.<sup>255</sup> Handel had a contingency plan to revive *Alcina*,<sup>256</sup> but abandoned this idea, presumably when the company realized *Atalanta* would be sufficiently prepared enough for a first performance on 12 May 1736. It celebrated the recent Royal wedding with a spectacular conclusion featuring the descent of Mercury and 'Illuminations and Bonfires, accompanied by loud Instrumental Musick'.<sup>257</sup> According to the next day's *London Daily Post*, this 'gave an uncommon Delight and Satisfaction ... and the whole was received with unusual Acclamations.'<sup>258</sup> *Atalanta* was performed eight times, and concluded Handel's season on 9 June 1736.

Handel's opera was 'more successful than the rival show put on by the Opera of the Nobility, a serenata called *La Festa d'Imeneo* ... which received four performances at the King's Theatre between 4 and 15 May',<sup>259</sup> but the instability of opera in London must have continued to cause Handel concern. One contemporary wrote that 'the two opera houses are, neither of them, in a successful way; and it is the confirmed opinion that this winter

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<sup>254</sup> Letter dated 8 May 1736 (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 17). The duet in *Ariodante* was 'Bramo aver mille vite'.

<sup>255</sup> *London Daily Post*, 29 April 1736 (*Deutsch* p. 405).

<sup>256</sup> On 22 April 1736 the Earl of Shaftesbury wrote that 'Alcina can-not be perform'd till the week after & when it is, I hear, Conti the new voice ... will have a new part excepting only Verdi Prati & La Bocca Vaga.' (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 15-16). Burrows commented that 'Handel did not revive *Alcina* until the beginning of the next season: perhaps the experience with *Ariodante* persuaded him that more time was needed to reconstruct the music for the principal role, if only two arias from the original score were suitable for Conti.'

<sup>257</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>258</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 407-8. The Prince of Wales made a point of staying away from the performances, but it must be noted that he soon afterwards chose to patronise Handel's company again.

<sup>259</sup> Dean: 'Handel's *Atalanta*' in *Sundry sorts of music books: Essays on The British Library Collections*, p. 226.

will compleat ... Handel's destruction',<sup>260</sup> while another expected that there would be 'no opera in the Haymarket next year'.<sup>261</sup> Despite both comments being premature with the exact prediction of these events, they were essentially accurate.

### Covent Garden, 1736-7

Handel's 1736-7 season was the conclusion to his career as an independent opera impresario that he had initiated in 1729. Since autumn 1733 Handel had been in competition with the Opera of the Nobility, and, although for a time each rival opera company seemed to alternate in their successes, both encountered serious financial difficulties.<sup>262</sup> Dean observed that 'When London had failed to support one opera company, it was a curious piece of economics to expect it to patronize two.'<sup>263</sup> The Opera of the Nobility had been depleted by Senesino and Cuzzoni returning to Italy at the end of the previous season,<sup>264</sup> and Handel sought 'to outbid them on sheer quantity instead of offering productions of a different sort, as he had done in 1734-5. It was the most ambitious season he had ever attempted single-handed: a repertory of 12 works (eight operas and four oratorios), of which five were new to the London audience. It is not surprising that his health gave way towards the end of the season.'<sup>265</sup>

The season commenced on 6 November 1736 with a revised version of *Alcina*. The *London Daily Post* on 1 November 1736 revealed that the Prince and Princess of Wales – now publicly supporters of Handel's – had made a special request for the season to open earlier than Handel had originally intended,<sup>266</sup> but the revival of *Alcina* managed only three performances. Ruggiero's arias, sung by Carestini in the 1735 original version, had to be

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<sup>260</sup> Letter from Benjamin Victor to Matthew Dubourg at Dublin, c. 15 May 1736 (*Deutsch*, pp. 408-9).

<sup>261</sup> Letter from Richard Fawcett to James Harris, 6 April 1736 (Burrows & Dunhill: *Op. cit.*, p. 14).

<sup>262</sup> In an examination of Box Office reports from several Handel operas performed during the mid-1730s, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume conclude that 'The figures ... show with painful clarity why both Handel and the Opera of the Nobility were on the road to bankruptcy.' (Milhous & Hume: 'Box Office Reports for Five Operas Mounted by Handel in London, 1732-1734', p. 265).

<sup>263</sup> *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 33.

<sup>264</sup> Farinelli remained in London for one more season.

<sup>265</sup> Burrows: *Op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>266</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 416.



transposed up a tone to accommodate the soprano castrato Conti. The role of Morgana, originally sung by soprano Cecilia Young in 1735, was transposed down for the alto Maria Rosa Negri, but with the consequence that Morgana's flirtatious aria 'Tornami e vagheggiar' at the end of Act I was nonsensically reallocated to Strada in the title role. Otherwise, most of the original 1735 cast retained their former roles, but the ballets were omitted, and the transformation chorus 'Dall' orror di notte cieca' that had been crucial to the resolution of the plot was eliminated.<sup>267</sup>

Handel revived *Atalanta* for the birthday of the Prince of Wales on 20 November 1736. The music used in the revival of *Atalanta* was substantially identical to its recent first version: it must have been useful for Handel to be able to revive a popular recent work while he still employed its original cast. The revived *Atalanta* was performed only twice, perhaps because Handel might have planned to progress quickly to an opportunity to introduce his new alto castrato Annibali. The singer's arrival in England was first reported in the *Daily Post* on 5 October 1736, on which day the *Old Whig* reported that Annibali 'was sent for to Kensington, and had the Honour to sing several Songs before her Majesty and the Princesses, who express'd the highest Satisfaction at his Performance.'<sup>268</sup>

However, Annibali did not sing in the revivals of *Alcina* and *Atalanta*. Perhaps Handel wanted to reserve Annibali's eagerly anticipated London debut for the revival of *Porro*.<sup>269</sup> In the meantime, Annibali's singing had attracted the curiosity of the Earl of Shaftesbury, who informed James Harris on 23 October 1736 that 'Annibale's voice is it seems of that kind they call a mezzo soprano. He sings very much in Senesino's manner[;] his voice is very tunefull; he is young & a very good master of musick. ... I hear too, Mr Handel has declared Annibale is a better singer than he expected him to be.' Shaftesbury

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<sup>267</sup> These revisions to the 1736 version of *Alcina* are listed in Clausen: Op. cit, pp. 93-5. The omission of the ballets and chorus were caused by the lack of dancers and extra singers during the 1736-7 season.

<sup>268</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 416.

<sup>269</sup> Handel began to prepare his revival of *Porro* as early as summer 1736, and initially intended to cast Conti in the title role. After Annibali's arrival this was no longer deemed necessary because the new alto castrato could perform the music at the same pitch as its original creator Senesino (Cummings: Op. cit., pp. 460-62, 468-71).

conceded that he had not actually heard Annibali, and revealed that the source of his information was traceable back to the cellist Pardini, who had accompanied the castrato during his performance for the Queen at Kensington on 5 October.<sup>270</sup> Similarly, on 27 November 1736 Mrs. Pendarves wrote that ‘Annibali ... has the best part of Senesino’s voice and Caristini’s, with a prodigious fine taste and good action!’<sup>271</sup> Annibali had still not yet sung publicly in London: we must assume Mrs. Pendarves heard him sing either privately or perhaps in a rehearsal of *Porro* prior to the performance planned for 1 December 1736, but postponed until a week later because ‘Strada was taken violently ill of a Fever and Sore Throat’.<sup>272</sup>

Strada was the only member of the original 1731 cast who remained in Handel’s company. Although it was possible for Handel to reorganise *Porro* to fit his current company without making too many drastic alterations, he instead made extensive and perplexing decisions. Only seventeen of the original arias were retained, and the tenor role of Alessandro was radically adapted for Conti. Annibali performed three arias from his own repertory that were not composed by Handel,<sup>273</sup> much like Conti had done in the revival of *Ariodante* the previous season. We do not know why Handel uncharacteristically used arias by other composers on these occasions, but presumably the method had the dual advantage of saving him time during the revision process, and allowed the new singer to demonstrate his skill to London audiences using arias he already felt comfortable performing. Perhaps Handel preferred this method after having experienced trouble adapting the role of Teseo in *Arianna in Creta* for the newly arrived Carestini in autumn 1733. The revival of *Porro* ran for four performances, but it is difficult to discern how well it was received.<sup>274</sup> If we consider Handel’s usual pattern of introducing an important new

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<sup>270</sup> Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>271</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 418.

<sup>272</sup> *The London Daily Post*, 2 December 1736 (*Deutsch*, p. 419).

<sup>273</sup> The three arias not composed by Handel were by Giovanni Alberto Ristori and Vinci. Both Ristori arias were from the opera *Le Fate* that Annibali had recently performed at Dresden in August 1736 (Cummings: Op. cit., pp. 470-1).

<sup>274</sup> Dean argued that the 1736 revival of *Porro* ‘sank towards the status of a pasticcio’ (Op. cit., p. 197).



opera early in the New Year, one presumes that Handel intended to supplant *Poro* with *Arminio* on 12 January 1737.

*Arminio* is usually criticized as a weak opera in Handel literature,<sup>275</sup> but the Earl of Shaftesbury informed James Harris that ‘The opera is rather grave[,] but correct & labour’d to the highest degree & is a favourite one with Handel. The bases & accompaniment if possible is better than usual. But I fear ‘twill not be acted very long. The Town dont much admire it.’<sup>276</sup> Furthermore, it seems that opinion about Annibali was sharply divided. The Earl of Shaftesbury heard him for this first time in *Arminio*, and declared to Harris that ‘he prodigiously surpass’d my expectations ... Upon the whole he pleases me the best of any singer I ever heard without exception’. Shaftesbury praised Annibali’s ability to deliver natural and spontaneous cadenzas, but observed that ‘Most people (not Sir Wyndham[,] Mr Jennens &c) are of a quite different opinion as to Annibali &c from myself’.<sup>277</sup> Shaftesbury’s letter also reveals to us that Handel had recently paid him a visit, and that the composer was ‘in high spirits and tells me he has now ready & compleated two more operas & can have something else this winter besides if there is occasion.’ The two new operas were *Giustino* and *Berenice*. Perhaps the ‘something else’ Handel had in mind was a revival of *Partenope*, and the ‘occasion’ for it was brought about by *Arminio* managing only five performances.

*Partenope*, with its plot regarding two principal suitors, had appropriate potential to be adapted for Conti and Annibali with equally prominent roles. We can speculate that Strada might have been pleased to revisit the impressive title role Handel created for her seven years earlier. The only other original cast member was Bertolli, who had returned to Handel after spending several years working for the Opera of the Nobility, although Bertolli was assigned a different role in the revival. Handel’s choice to follow *Poro* and *Arminio* with *Partenope* was probably a conscious injection of a lighter entertainment. But

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<sup>275</sup> Dean judged the libretto of *Arminio* ‘muddled and often ridiculous’ (*Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 61).

<sup>276</sup> Letter dated 18 January 1737 (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 22-3).

<sup>277</sup> Shaftesbury also assessed that Conti ‘keeps more within his voice’, which is ironic because Conti’s part in *Arminio* requires several top Cs. Perhaps Shaftesbury’s remarks were not a comment on range alone.

there were only four performances of *Partenope*, between 29 January and 9 February 1737, and it might have fared worse had the first and third performances not been commanded by the Prince and Princess of Wales.<sup>278</sup>

Despite the apparent failure of the revised *Partenope*, it might have been Handel's intention to introduce his next new opera, *Giustino*, in early February 1737. The Earl of Egmont's diary reveals that rehearsals for *Giustino* were underway on 7 February,<sup>279</sup> but perhaps it was not ready enough when *Arminio* was performed on 12 February. *Giustino* is the least serious of Handel's three new operas composed for the 1736-7 season. Its libretto seems ironic to a modern reader, and Handel's musical response is consistently lively. Burney considered that *Giustino* 'seems to me one of the most agreeable of Handel's dramatic productions'.<sup>280</sup> It was certainly the most popular work during the 1736-7 season, with a total of nine performances. Burney suggested that the sixth performance of *Giustino* 'was performed to a splendid audience',<sup>281</sup> so it seems that the Covent Garden theatre was not always empty. However, perhaps the brief popularity of *Giustino* lost momentum when its run of performances was interrupted by Lent.<sup>282</sup>

Handel planned for the core of the season to contain revivals of *Parnasso in Festa*, *Alexander's Feast* and *Esther*, and unpredictably elected to revise his earliest Italian oratorio *Il Trionfo del Tempo*. Although only one of those works was actually an English oratorio, the policy kept Handel's season active and open to an audience while other theatres were shut. Handel recommenced with Italian operas after Lent and Easter. The last few months of the 1736-7 season were exceptionally beleaguered. The first opera performance after the mid-season oratorios was the pasticcio *Didone abbandonata*. Like several Second Academy pasticcios, *Didone* matched a fashionable recent Italian libretto

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<sup>278</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 424. Perhaps the Prince of Wales requested the revival of *Partenope*.

<sup>279</sup> Diary entry dated 7 February 1737 (*Deutsch*, p. 425).

<sup>280</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 807-9.

<sup>281</sup> Burney claims that this was reported 'in the newspapers of the time' (*Ibid.*). There are none in *Deutsch*.

<sup>282</sup> Handel had already given several performances of *Giustino* during the early part of Lent in 1737 despite the fact that operas and plays were forbidden in London theatres.



(this time by Metastasio) and arias predominantly by Vinci.<sup>283</sup> It was probably soon after its second performance on 20 April 1737 that Handel suffered a stroke that paralysed his right arm.<sup>284</sup> The third performance was probably directed by John Christopher Smith Jr. Like most of Handel's own works that season, *Didone* was unsuccessful and (literally) abandoned.<sup>285</sup>

It is impossible to determine whether Handel's illness or low audiences caused the uncharacteristically stilted appearance of the remainder of the season. It was most likely an unfortunate combination of both. On 26 April 1737, Shaftesbury wrote to James Harris that Handel 'is in no danger upon the whole though I fear[,] or am rather too certain[,] that he will loose a great part of his execution so as to prevent his ever playing any more concertos on the organ'. By the 30 April 1737 Shaftesbury wrote again that 'Handel is suprizingly mended[;] he has been on horseback twice ... he will recover again presently'. On the same date the *London Daily Post* reported that 'Mr. Handel, who had been some time indisposed with the rheumatism, is in so fair a way of recovery, that it is hoped he will be able to accompany the opera of Justin on Wednesday next, the 4th of May'.<sup>286</sup> Perhaps Handel chose to perform *Giustino* again because its original run of performances was only suspended due to Lent. Maybe it was less onerous for Handel to direct another performance of *Giustino* than to instead return to work by producing the new opera *Berenice*. Handel was not resting: on 12 May 1737 Shaftesbury attended a rehearsal of *Berenice*, and wrote that 'Mr Handel is better though not well enough to play the harpsichord himself[,] which young Smith is to do for him.'<sup>287</sup> Soon afterwards Handel suffered a relapse. On 14 May 1737 the *London Evening Post* reported that 'Mr. Handell is

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<sup>283</sup> *Didone* also featured music by Vivaldi, Ristori and Hasse (Strohm: 'Handel's pasticci', pp. 210-1).

<sup>284</sup> Deutsch claimed that Handel suffered a stroke on 13 April 1737. While this is not impossible, the Earl of Shaftesbury's letter to James Harris about Handel's illness is dated 26 April 1737, and Burrows commented 'It seems very likely that Shaftesbury would have been one of the first people to know of Handel's illness, in which case it probably occurred soon after the second performance of *Didone*.' (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 26-7).

<sup>285</sup> An alleged fourth performance of *Didone* on 1 June 1737 is listed in *The London Stage*, but its occurrence cannot be substantiated. Even the Earl of Shaftesbury was not impressed with *Didone*, and described it as 'very heavy' (Ibid., pp. 26-7).

<sup>286</sup> Deutsch, pp. 432-3.

<sup>287</sup> Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 29.

very much indispos'd, and it's thought with a Paraletick Disorder, he having at present no Use of his Right Hand, which, if he don't regain, the Publick will be depriv'd of his fine Compositions.'<sup>288</sup>

It is unlikely that Handel directed any performances of *Berenice*. The opera was first produced on 18 May 1737, and ran for only three verifiable performances.<sup>289</sup> Maybe Handel's absence from the harpsichord contributed towards its failure. The company managed to complete the season with revivals of *Giustino*, *Alcina*, and *Alexander's Feast*, but these were all works that it had already performed earlier in the season. It is not fanciful to imagine that the last few performances by Handel's company were an attempt to publicly proclaim a hollow victory over the Opera of the Nobility, whose season fizzled out on 11 June 1737. Financial resources and political challenges surely played a part in drawing this intensely challenging and diverse period of Handel's career to a conclusion, but the onset of serious health problems must have been a decisive influence on ending his opera seasons at Covent Garden.

Hume sought to dispel the apocryphal impression that Handel was an impoverished and broken martyr churning out mediocre compositions and fighting off bailiffs at the end of the fateful 1736-7 season:

The lurid tale of Handel's stubborn adherence to Italian opera in the 1730s and his consequent ruin (or at least near-ruin) makes fine fodder for popular biographers, but it rests on false assumptions and unverifiable extrapolations. There is no definite proof that Handel ever personally lost money as an opera entrepreneur between 1729 and 1738. This may seem an outrageous statement - and indeed

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<sup>288</sup> Deutsch, p. 434. For a biographical account of Handel's illness, see Mainwaring: *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel*, pp. 121-3. The most scientific analysis of Handel's illness, including a plausible diagnosis, is William D. Frosch: 'Handel's Illness of 1737' in *HJb* 1994/5.

<sup>289</sup> The fourth performance of *Berenice* is alleged to have occurred on 15 June 1737, but its occurrence cannot be substantiated.



Handel probably did lose some of his own money - but any alternative view rests not on hard evidence but on long-standing assumptions.<sup>290</sup>

Even without solid documentary evidence that Handel's private financial security was threatened during the 1730s, the situation during the final Covent Garden opera season was sufficiently bad for Edward Holdsworth to express concern that Handel should be persuaded 'to lay quiet for a year or two; and then I am persuaded that his enemies will sink of course, and many of them will court him as much as now they oppose him.'<sup>291</sup> But until old age and blindness restricted his choices, Handel never 'lay quiet' in such a fashion. He had vociferously pursued independent management of his own working life since January 1729, when he had advocated to the directionless Royal Academy of Music that there was need of a change, and expressed a desire to renew the old system on his own terms.<sup>292</sup> Handel certainly experienced the change and renewal he desired during the Second Academy and Covent Garden opera seasons, but by the summer 1737 the fifty-two year old composer could no longer sustain such an active level of independent ventures (or, at least, not by composing operas). Before the end of his last Covent Garden opera season, Handel was already negotiating with the Nobility directors for the remnants of their two struggling opera companies to merge for the ill-fated 1737-8 season at the King's Theatre.<sup>293</sup> After such an intense rivalry, it seems that the directors of opera at the King's Theatre (who might be reasonably described as the Royal Academy of Music) eventually accepted that they needed Handel, whilst their renegade former Director of Music accepted that he could not continue on his own.<sup>294</sup> Handel was content to return to being a hired gun, albeit only for the short term.

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<sup>290</sup> 'Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', pp. 361-2.

<sup>291</sup> Letter to Charles Jennens, 15 March 1737 (*HHB* 4, p. 277).

<sup>292</sup> Paraphrased from Rolli's letter dated 25 January 1729 (*Deutsch*, pp. 235-6).

<sup>293</sup> Burrows: 'Handel and the London Opera Companies in the 1730s', pp. 160-1.

<sup>294</sup> Handel 'presumably thought that co-operation was the safest, and perhaps the only possible, option, in view of the parlous state of opera in London and his own health.' (*Ibid.*, p. 161)

## Chapter 2 *Partenope* (HWV 27)

### Part One: The Creation of Handel's *Partenope*

#### Aspects of the libretto

Edward J. Dent remarked that '*Partenope* is perhaps the best libretto that Handel ever set', and suggested that the drama possesses a Shakespearean atmosphere.<sup>295</sup> Dent's claim requires clarification: *Partenope* does not resemble the Shakespearean characteristics familiar from the tragedies and histories that have obvious kinship with early eighteenth-century opera seria. Although Partenope is a patriotic monarch who professes to fight for liberty, her level of heroism and leadership skills are not comparable to Shakespeare's Henry V. Arsace is a flawed hero who, in order to gain forgiveness, must suffer the scorn of all others - but he does not ask penetrating questions about nature like King Lear, nor does the exposed philanderer contemplate the meaning of his existence like Hamlet. Dent was right that *Partenope* contains traces of Shakespearian scenarios, but it is those of Shakespeare the comedian. In particular, *Partenope* is Handel's equivalent of *Twelfth Night*, including use of disguise, cross-dressing and confusion over identity. Handel's opera is an amused examination of humanity, and adopts an honest approach to depicting a world in which humour, sadness, ridicule, pity, grief, and reconciliation all play a vital part.<sup>296</sup>

*Partenope* was a popular libretto in the early eighteenth-century. It was written for Naples in 1699 by Silvio Stampiglia (1664-1725), and first set to music by Luigi Mancia.<sup>297</sup> The Roman-born Stampiglia was one of the fourteen founding members of the Accademia degli Arcadi, but for many years Stampiglia was associated with opera projects in Naples. Like Handel a few years later, Stampiglia did not always conform to Arcadian

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<sup>295</sup> Dent: 'Handel's Operas', pp. 44-5.

<sup>296</sup> Perhaps it is Shakespeare who describes such a melting pot of dramatic styles most effectively, with Polonius's definition of 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' as a dramatic genre (*Hamlet*, II.ii).

<sup>297</sup> Claudio Sartori: *Libretti Italiani a Stampa dalle Origini al 1800*, p. 357. Other versions of Stampiglia's *La Partenope* also appeared under different titles, such as *La Rosmira Fedele*.



ideals despite being part of their circle.<sup>298</sup> Michael F. Robinson opined that ‘Stampiglia’s earlier librettos are really galant comedies in which the paths of the pair of lovers (mostly of a princely rank) cross and recross until such a time as the story should conveniently end. Heroism of the kind connected with manly courage is hardly known.’<sup>299</sup> Robinson was correct that Stampiglia’s *Partenope* does not resemble typically noble *opera seria*, but perhaps this led Robinson to condemn the libretto’s comic flavour too harshly when he judged that Stampiglia’s dialogue ‘contains a great many short, staccato sentences which characters toss about between themselves or pass, as asides, to the audience. The language is bald in the extreme and only attempts to rise above the ordinary when extreme emotions are aroused or gallant feelings expressed.’ *Partenope* perfectly fits Robinson’s description of Stampiglia’s style, but the widespread popularity of the libretto over a number of years is a clear indication that it contains more sustainable dramatic value than mere parochial amusement for late seventeenth-century Neapolitans.

Despite its origin as an opera specifically created for Naples and based on a Neapolitan myth,<sup>300</sup> Stampiglia’s use of direct language and eschewing of the static stereotype of virtuous heroism combine to create realistic sentimental actions and reactions. The plot offers ample scope for emotional intensity, insightful characterisation, wit, sexual innuendo, and profound despair. Partenope is Queen of the newly founded city of Naples, and is loved by three suitors: Arsace, Armindo, and Emilio. Arsace is her chosen favourite, although she is fond of Armindo too. Emilio is the military-minded leader of a neighbouring kingdom, and wishes to command Partenope to love him instead (he is humiliatingly rejected and then defeated in the ensuing battle). Ormonte is the

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<sup>298</sup> For an overview of Stampiglia’s career and work, see Michael F. Robinson: *Naples and Neapolitan Opera* Clarendon Press, Oxford 1972. See also Reinhard Strohm: *Drama per Music: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 69-70. Strohm observes that Stampiglia’s other libretti did not enjoy the same level of success, and briefly compares *Partenope* settings by Sarri and Vinci.

<sup>299</sup> Robinson: Op. cit., pp. 42-3. Robinson makes some observations about Stampiglia’s use of language and plot that help to place *Partenope* into context.

<sup>300</sup> According to mythology, Queen Partenope was the founder of Naples. The opera starts with a ceremony marking the city’s foundation, and the title character is portrayed as the perfect Queen: feminine both in her gracious favours and vindictive in response to betrayal, and attractive enough to cause three Princes to become rivals. Furthermore, she is patriotic going into battle and decisive in both personal and political situations.

Captain of Partenope's Guards. When 'Eurimene' arrives at Court, 'he' claims to have been shipwrecked, and is granted sanctuary by the generous Queen. Arsace recognizes that Eurimene is actually the Princess Rosmira disguised as a man. Arsace was previously betrothed to Rosmira, and becomes confused about which woman he loves. Arsace privately confronts Rosmira, and she forces him to swear a vow of secrecy. Arsace must never reveal her true identity if he hopes to be forgiven for his infidelity. However, throughout the opera Rosmira wreaks chaotic revenge upon him whilst remaining disguised as 'Eurimene'. Arsace refuses to respond to Eurimene's insults, and resolves to bear his adversity whilst Rosmira becomes increasingly addicted to her pursuit of vengeance. The other unsuspecting characters begin to believe that Arsace is a coward. Eventually, when all have deserted him except the penitent Emilio, Arsace is forced to duel with Eurimene. Not wishing to fight the woman he now realizes he still loves, Arsace triumphantly declares 'ma combattere io voglio a petto ignudo' (*scena ultima*). Rosmira cannot fight bare-chested without her femininity being revealed and is forced to confess her deception. This explains all the bemusing incidents observed but misunderstood by the others. Partenope has already transferred her affection to the steadfast Armindo, so she is happy to approve the reconciliation between Arsace and Rosmira, and sends the reformed Emilio away on friendly terms. As Dean rightly observed, 'For once the *lieto fine* does not strain credulity.'<sup>301</sup>

Stampiglia's libretto was set to music many times during the early eighteenth-century; it is likely that Handel attended a performance of Caldara's version of *Partenope* at the Venice Carnival in 1707/8. Caldara retained the basic characteristics of Stampiglia's 1699 libretto, but there were a few changes.<sup>302</sup> The original libretto included two less vital

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<sup>301</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 154. See pp. 151-4 for Dean's fully detailed synopsis of *Partenope*. My preliminary articles about aspects of the opera, not cited by Dean, were published in 2003 and 2005 (see Bibliography). Our work on *Partenope* has been entirely independent, but it transpires that we share a similar positive regard for the opera in general.

<sup>302</sup> For a detailed discussion of various Italian *Partenope* librettos from 1699 to 1720, see Robert Freeman: 'The Travels of Partenope' in *Studies in Music History* (see Bibliography). Freeman does not discuss Handel's version of *Partenope* directly.



characters, Beltramme (Rosmira's manservant) and Anfrisa (Partenope's elderly nurse who is determined to capture Beltramme in matrimony). Both are comic servants, rooted in the Neapolitan *intermedi* tradition. Their five episodes are comic observations that are not often relevant to the main drama. For example, halfway through Act II Beltramme contributes a comic pearl of wisdom with an aria expressing his puzzlement concerning modern woman's preference of lap dogs to men.<sup>303</sup> Caldara's version had a much smaller role for Beltramme, and omitted Anfrisa entirely.<sup>304</sup>

The music for Caldara's *Partenope* is lost, but its libretto was certainly the model that Handel chose, or had available, for his own setting over two decades years later, despite his familiarity with at least two much more recent adaptations including Vinci's *La Rosmira Fedele* (Venice, 1725).<sup>305</sup> It is intriguing that the Royal Academy of Music rejected a proposal to include *Partenope* in their 1726-7 season featuring the 'Rival Queens' Cuzzoni and Faustina. Maybe Handel recalled his experience of Caldara's *Partenope* in Venice many years before, and realized the story's portrayal of two equally prominent female characters was an ideal solution for the difficult challenge of balancing Cuzzoni and Faustina in the same cast. But while it is likely that Handel expressed a desire to set Stampiglia's *Partenope*, it is also possible that Faustina Bordoni could have supported the proposal: she had sung the role of Rosmira at least twice before in Italy.<sup>306</sup> Perhaps *Partenope* was rejected by Royal Academy directors who disliked its overtly comic irony, but the decision was arguably a missed opportunity: the characters Handel

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>304</sup> Beltramme only has twenty-five lines of recitative to perform in the entire 1708 printed libretto, so it was simple to remove him from the London version of *Partenope*. However, we cannot assume Handel disapproved having such characters in his operas when the drama required them. *Serse* is another 'antiheroic' Stampiglia libretto that Handel set in the 1730s, but in that opera Handel retained the comic servant Elviro (Handel's only unambiguously buffo role), who is similar to Beltramme in social status and character, but has a more crucial function in the core plot and cannot be omitted (see Dean: 'Handel's *Serse*' in *Opera and the Enlightenment*, pp. 138-141).

<sup>305</sup> Handel used several arias from Vinci's *La Rosmira Fedele* in the pasticcio *Elpidia* (1725). Strohm believes that Handel's later pasticcios confirm that the composer preferred Vinci's music to all other contemporary Italian opera composers (*Dramma per Musica*, p. 70). John Roberts believes Handel was also familiar with Sarro's setting (Naples, 1722), but that it does not have substantial relevance to Handel's own *Partenope* setting (personal communication).

<sup>306</sup> Faustina had sung Rosmira in Sarro's *Partenope* (1722) and Vinci's *La Rosmira Fedele* (1725). See Dean: *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 156 footnote 10.

eventually created in 1730 are not without dignity and integrity when it matters from a dramatic point of view, and one wonders how Handel might have responded musically to setting the roles of Partenope and Rosmira for the 'Rival Queens'.

The Royal Academy of Music's disapproval of *Partenope* probably arose from the opera's irreverent treatment of the serious style it had struggled to establish in London. The Royal Academy of Music had spent seven years attempting to persuade London audiences that foreign castratos could be convincingly heroic on stage. In *Partenope* the leading man Arsace is neither virtuous nor evil, but weak and morally flawed, and struggles to earn forgiveness from Rosmira, a cross-dresser obsessed with revenge. There is plenty of enlightened morality in their reconciliation, but perhaps the Academy feared it was unlikely to be recognized when sung by a Roman Catholic eunuch challenging his betrayed lover to bare her Italian chest before the Protestant public. The libretto was certainly controversial to some. The mere notion of it being put on provoked a torrent of indignation from the theatre agent Owen Swiney, who complained to the Duke of Richmond:

[Senesino] put me in a Sweat in telling me that Parthenope was likely to be brought on the stage, for it is the very worst book (excepting one) that I ever read in my whole life: Signor Stampiglia (the author of it) endeavours to be humourous and witty, in it: If he succeeded in his attempt, on any stage in Italy, 'twas meerly, from a depravity of Taste in his audience - but I am very sure that 'twill be received with contempt in England ... if it is to be done, t'will bring more scandal & lesse profit, than any opera, that has been, yet, acted to The Hay-Market Theatre.<sup>307</sup>

Elizabeth Gibson believed it is unlikely that the Royal Academy rejected *Partenope* in 1726 under Swiney's influence, but his letter is an indication of the virulent opposition to the project. Swiney hinted at Faustina's possible involvement with the proposal by adding that 'I know the Faustina is in love with her selfe in this opera'. Swiney is equally

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<sup>307</sup> Letter of 2/13 August 1726 (Gibson: *The Royal Academy of Music 1719-1728: Its Institution and its Directors*, pp. 248-9).



dismissive of the title role, suggesting that it would suit a ‘He-She-Something or other’ better than Cuzzoni. However, Swiney’s attitude is paradoxical, if not shamelessly hypocritical. Only the previous season, Swiney had rated Vinci’s *La Rosmira Fedele* highly enough to recommend arias from it for the Royal Academy’s pasticcio *Elpidia*,<sup>308</sup> and he had shown no personal distaste for this style of humour when he had produced Stampiglia’s very similar libretto *Il Trionfo di Camilla* on 30 March 1706 at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, during his ill-fated tenure as director of its opera company. Moreover, Swiney was responsible for reviving *Camilla* at Lincolns-Inn-Fields during the same year that he attacked *Partenope*. His outburst that it was ‘the very worst book ... I ever read in my whole life’ is inconsistent with these other events, and one suspects that he was motivated by a personal or political agenda we cannot now discern.<sup>309</sup>

If the mix of comedy and passion was truly reprehensible to Swiney, Senesino, or the Royal Academy’s directors, it is transparent that it appealed to Handel. The Royal Academy of Music disintegrated two years later, and, although Handel and Heidegger were probably still dependant on subscriptions and Royal patronage, it is conceivable that Handel enjoyed greater flexibility and control in his new relatively freelance career.<sup>310</sup> As established in Chapter 1, the variety of libretto subjects and musical genres created and performed by Handel during the Second Academy’s five-year span is unmatched in any other period of his career. It is difficult to interpret Handel’s decision to compose *Partenope* so shortly after assuming artistic control of producing Italian operas in London as coincidental. It is plausible that Stampiglia’s libretto had appealed to Handel’s dramatic instinct and musical imagination since his first encounter with it in 1708, that he admired (and borrowed from) other settings of it during the mid-1720s, that he wanted to produce his own version in 1726, and, when this opportunity was denied, he composed his own

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<sup>308</sup> According to Reinhard Strohm, the use of Vinci’s arias from *La Rosmira Fedele* was ‘partly on advice from Venice by the opera manager Owen Swiney’ (*Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, p. 70).

<sup>309</sup> Suzana Ograjenšek observed that Swiney was always ‘concerned with his own interests.’ (Op. cit., p. 29).

<sup>310</sup> Strohm speculates that ‘During the years of the so-called second Academy [Handel] could, if he wanted, make an even more radical claim to the responsibility for his own opera texts than before’ (Ibid., p.65).

version as soon as possible afterwards. *Partenope* was probably an opera that Handel wanted to compose.

Old Italian librettos were adapted by literary assistants for Handel's use in London. In some cases these assistants are identifiable, but *Partenope* is one of many librettos adapted for Handel anonymously. Nicola Haym, Handel's favourite assistant and cellist in the Haymarket opera orchestra, died in August 1729. Strohm suggested that Rossi was responsible for several of Handel's librettos during the Second Academy period, but there is no evidence connecting Rossi with *Partenope*.<sup>311</sup> It is conceivable that before his death Haym prepared some librettos for Handel. Neither *La Partenope* or *La Rosmira Fedele* are listed in the posthumous inventory of Haym's libretto collection,<sup>312</sup> but of course the working copy of the text might already have been prepared in 1726 and might have already passed out of Haym's possession.<sup>313</sup> Ellen Harris supported this theory with an assertion that 'in the absence of documentary evidence demonstrating otherwise, the stylistic evidence points to Haym as the adaptor of *Partenope*; its libretto demonstrates the stanza lengths, scenic flexibility, and use of ensemble typical of Haym's earlier work.'<sup>314</sup> Harris also drew attention to parallels between late Royal Academy librettos and early Second Academy projects, and pointed out that the pasticcio texts *Ormisda* and *Venceslao* were also rejected by the Royal Academy a few years before Handel used them anyway. Harris suggested that this shows Handel lacked greater choice, but it is equally plausible that this pattern demonstrates his stubborn resolve to pursue an independent artistic course that did not always conform to the tastes of the Academy's directors.

A remarkably high proportion of aria texts from Stampiglia's 1708 libretto were retained in Handel's 1730 setting. The table below lists the sources of texts for accompanied recitatives, arias and ensembles:

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-68.

<sup>312</sup> Gibson: Op. cit, pp. 439-465.

<sup>313</sup> It is also possible that Haym used a copy of the Venetian libretto that Handel might have kept since 1708.

<sup>314</sup> *The Librettos of Handel's Operas*, Vol. 6, p. xiv.



<b>Handel's <i>Partenope</i></b> (1730a unless otherwise indicated) <sup>315</sup>	<b>Venice 1708</b> - literally retained -	<b>Venice 1708</b> - slightly adapted -	<b>London 1730</b> - entirely new -
Act I: Coro: 'Viva Partenope'	✓		
Partenope 'L' Amor ed il Destin'		✓	
Arsace 'O Eurimene'	✓		
Rosmira 'Se non ti sai spiegar'	✓		
Armindo 'Voglio dire al mio tesoro'	✓		
Rosmira 'Un' altra volta ancor'	✓		
Arsace 'Sento amor'		✓	
Ormonte 'T'appresta forse amore'			✓
Arsace & Partenope 'Per te moro'	✓		
Partenope 'Sei mia gioia'		✓	
Arsace 'Dimmi pietoso Ciel'	✓		
Emilio 'Anch'io pagnar saprò'	✓		
Partenope 'Io ti levo'	✓		
Arsace 'E' figlio il mio timore'	✓		
Rosmira 'Io seguo sol fiero'			✓
Act II: Duet & Coro 'Con valorosa mano'	✓		
Quintet & Coro 'Vi circondi la gloria'	✓		
Emilio 'Contro un pudico'		✓	
Emilio 'Barbaro fato, sì'	✓		
Partenope 'Care mura'	✓		
Partenope 'Voglio amare'	✓		
Arsace & Rosm. 'E vuoi con dure tempre'	✓		
Rosmira 'Furie son dell'alma mia'	✓		
Arsace 'Poterti dir vorrei'	✓		
Armindo 'Non chiedo o luci vaghe'	✓		
Partenope 'Qual farfalletta'			✓
Arsace 'Furibondo'			✓
Act III: Part., Ars., Arm., Em.: 'Non è incauto'	✓		
Rosmira 'Arsace, oh Dio!'	✓		
Partenope 'Spera e godi'		✓	
Emilio 'La speme ti consoli'	✓		
Arsace 'Ch' io parta?'	✓		
Rosmira 'Quel volto mi piace'	✓		
Armindo 'Nobil core'			✓
Arsace 'Ma quai note'	✓		
Rosmira 'Cielil che miro?'			✓
Part., Rosm., & Arsace 'Un cor infedele'	✓		
Arsace 'Fatto è amor'		✓	
Emilio 'La gloria in nobil alma'			✓
Partenope 'Sì scherza sì'			✓
Arsace 'Seguaci di Cupido' (added in 1730b)		✓	
Coro 'D' Imeneo le belle tede'			✓

<sup>315</sup> N.B. this does not include aria texts adapted for the 1737 revival (see Appendix 2b).

There are two important aspects of the libretto's preparation that we do not know. Firstly, it is possible that 'new' 1730 London texts were taken from other old librettos that have not yet been identified.<sup>316</sup> Secondly, we do not know the extent of the Handel's personal influence on the preparation of the text. Dean suggested that Handel could have adapted Stampiglia's *Serse* himself,<sup>317</sup> and Strohm proposed that Handel was sometimes directly involved in preparations of librettos.<sup>318</sup> There is no evidence to contradict these theories, and Handel's Italian was fluent enough for him to be able to take independent decisions. We assume that the version of the libretto Handel set to music had his approval and involvement. There are eyewitness accounts of Handel's keen interest in the texts he set, such as Thomas Morrell's undated letter written after Handel's death that describes their collaborations.<sup>319</sup> Although that example dates from many years later, it would be foolish to suppose that Handel's interest in the literary aspects of his librettos suddenly sprang into existence with the English-language oratorios towards the end of his life. It is possible that Handel was closely involved with the adaptation of Stampiglia's *Partenope*.

### Handel's composition process

A comparison of Handel's libretto text, especially his handwritten version in the autograph manuscript, with the printed Venetian source confirms that Handel imagined the drama when creating his music. An examination of the variants between the 1708 source libretto, Handel's autograph score, and the 1730 printed wordbook illustrates the composer's remarkably detailed and visual use of stage directions. He often copied out full directions from the source libretto in his autograph score, including many small details omitted from the 1730 printed wordbook. Perhaps these were important aids for stimulating his

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<sup>316</sup> For example, my own research has revealed that the aria text 'Lassa! ch'io t'ho perduta' (sung by Strada in *Atalanta*, 1736) had been sung by Senesino a decade earlier in Ariosti's Royal Academy opera *Vespasiano* (with the feminine 'Lassa' changed from the masculine 'Lasso'). Although this text also appears in the *Atalanta* source libretto by Belisario Valeriani, the relationship between *Vespasiano* and *Atalanta* raises speculation that there might be more examples of Handel recycling aria texts from less obvious sources.

<sup>317</sup> 'Handel's *Serse*', p. 139. However, Burrows suggested that it might have been prepared by Angelo Corri ('Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', p. 162).

<sup>318</sup> Op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>319</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 851-853.



imagination during the creative process. The opening scene shows his keen attention to small detail: he wrote several key phrases in his manuscript, such as ‘Sole nascente’,<sup>320</sup> and ‘popolo numeroso, e corteggio’.<sup>321</sup> These vital pieces of descriptive visual information taken from the source libretto are missing from the printed wordbook. Perhaps it was not possible to stage these scenes in the King’s Theatre in February 1730, but such descriptions evidently mattered to Handel’s imagination.<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, he wrote numerous extra comments directing the action and attitude of characters that do not appear in the 1708 source libretto.<sup>323</sup> These always clarify the action on stage, particularly the responses of characters. Handel often wrote precise indications of asides, and in several cases he specified to whom characters should address certain lines that are without indication in the source libretto. During Rosmira’s confrontation with Arsace (I.v), Handel instructs that ‘Rosmira stà un poco sospesa e poi risoluta’. This direction specifies what Rosmira’s visible reaction to Arsace’s apology must be, and demonstrates Handel’s control of crucial dramatic moments. A similar example is when the shy Armindo makes an unsuccessful attempt to tell Partenope he loves her (I.vii): after Armindo’s line ‘Di sovrano bellezza avvampo’ Handel wrote ‘La riguarda teneramente’ in the autograph score: his instruction for Armindo to look tenderly at Partenope clarifies both the action and the characterisation of Armindo. Similarly, he instructed that Rosmira ‘parte sdegnata’ immediately before Arsace’s aria ‘Dimmi pietoso Ciel’ (I.ix). In the source libretto Rosmira had an aria to sing here, but it is cut from Handel’s version. According to his conception, Arsace is held in such contempt by Rosmira that he does not even deserve an aria from her, and her disdainful departure provides a much more satisfying catalyst for Arsace’s ‘Dimmi pietoso Ciel’. In all three cases cited above, Handel’s autograph manuscript contains his apparently unique instructions to singers how to act their roles.

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<sup>320</sup> Indicating that the opera commences at daybreak.

<sup>321</sup> Specifying that numerous people and the Queen’s personal cortege are present.

<sup>322</sup> See Appendix 2b for a collation of libretto texts for Handel’s setting of *Partenope*.

<sup>323</sup> Some of these are included in the 1730 first edition printed libretto.

Handel's autograph is an illuminating source of information about his creative process. Many aria texts taken from the source libretto contain small alterations that make a substantial difference to their dramatic impact and significance. For example, when Partenope transfers her affection from Arsace to Armindo (III.ii) she sings 'Spera e godi o mio tesoro', but the source libretto has 'Spera, e godi ò mio diletto'. Partenope might seem more flirtatious and teasing when she calls Armindo her 'treasure' than she could have appeared by calling him her 'delight', and it also conveys her renunciation of Arsace more bitterly. Handel's new text does not rhyme as perfectly with the next line 'Gioia e luce del mio petto', but he evidently felt that the difference to characterisation made by one changed word was worth sacrificing literary purity.

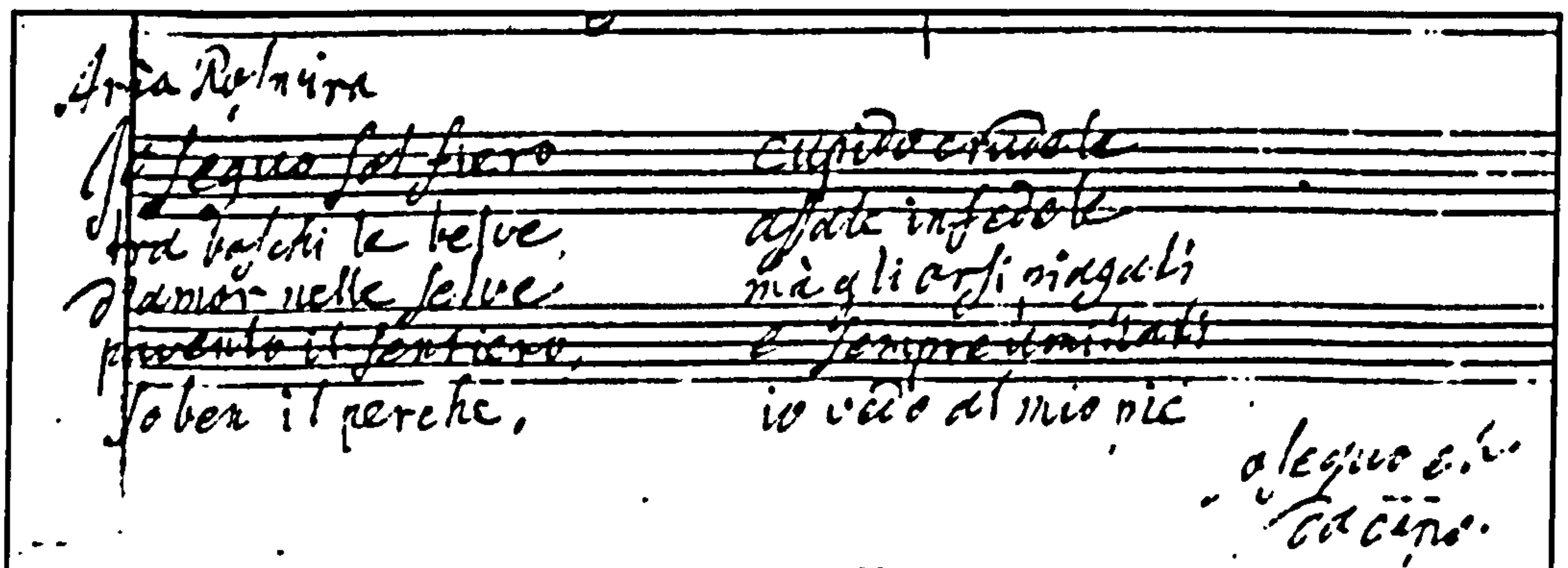
Several entirely 'new' aria texts are consistently strong and insightful. Handel often used these to supplant less effective source libretto texts. The best examples of this are his new aria texts at the conclusion of each Act, which without exception provided him with a better opportunity for a conclusive musical flourish and stronger dramatic statement. In the 1708 source libretto, Act I concludes with an agreeable aria for Rosmira, 'La mia fè vivace', which is addressed to Armindo. It is neither passionate nor direct, and has little relevance to Rosmira's particular situation. However, any outburst expressing how Rosmira really feels whilst in the presence of another character is strictly forbidden by the need for her identity to remain secret. Handel's new text, 'Io seguo sol fiero', is a clever compromise, giving Rosmira a bold personal statement without threatening to give away her real identity to Armindo. It is a simile aria, and Rosmira compares herself to a hunter stalking his prey while suffering at the hands of Cupid:

My Genius leads me to the Glades,  
The lonely Lawns, and silent Shades,  
To see my swift unerring Spear  
O'ertake the fearful flying Deer.  
The fatal Paths of Love I fly,



And wisely know the Reason why;  
 For Cupid's unrelenting Mind  
 Is ever cruel to our Kind;  
 But at my Feet, my conquer'd Prize,  
 The humble wounded Savage dies.<sup>324</sup>

I disagree with Dean's interpretation that Handel's insertion loosens the structure and 'has little connection' with Rosmira's character.<sup>325</sup> Armindo does not know what or whom 'Eurimene' is hunting, and Rosmira's disguise prevents her from speaking plainly with her new friend present on stage, but the audience comprehends with absolute clarity that Rosmira is using a metaphor for her quest to 'hunt down' Arsace. Handel's introduction of this new aria text also gives us an unusual glimpse of his working compositional methods: he wrote out the entire text in two parallel verses on RM.20.b.11 f. 38v, prior to composing the full musical setting on the following folios.



It is highly unusual for Handel to have written out the poetic text in full. Maybe he could have written it down whilst taking dictation from a collaborator, or copied the text directly from another libretto or musical source not yet identified. Perhaps Handel often copied 'new' inserted aria texts for his compositions from other unknown sources. If so, maybe he usually wrote the verses on a separate piece of paper, and on this occasion no separate scrap of paper was available. Alternatively, his literary Italian might have been

<sup>324</sup> Translation from the 1730 libretto.

<sup>325</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, pp. 155-7.

adequate for him to be considered as the original author of the aria text. Regardless of its authorship or why he wrote out the text, it is reasonable to speculate that having the words of 'Io seguo sol fiero' close to hand assisted his compositional process.

At the end of Act II, the source libretto has the aria text 'Amanti voi, che andate' for Arsace. After suffering humiliations galore instigated by Rosmira, it seems dramatically inadequate at this stage of the plot for Arsace to respond to fresh insults from Rosmira with a trite and psychologically implausible text, in which he incongruously declares that he will never find a more faithful love than his first. Throughout his operas Handel seems to have preferred ending his middle acts with a greater sense of suspense and confusion. In order to make Arsace's conflicting emotions seem less resolved (and therefore more interesting), Handel instead gave Arsace the new aria text 'Furibondo spiri il vento', which allows the character's unrestrained frustration to be expressed for the first time in a tempestuous soliloquy. It almost seems to hint at madness, and is a precursor of the celebrated mad scene composed for Senesino in *Orlando* three years later. Contrary to Stampiglia's harmless announcement that Arsace still loves Rosmira, 'Furibondo' provides precisely the kind of statement Handel required for finishing a central act of an opera. According to the translation in the printed libretto, Arsace rages that 'The furious blast resistless flies, at once confounding Earth and Skies: Such Tumults in my Soul I bear, Sprung from the Torture of Despair'.<sup>326</sup>

There are several signs in the autograph of *Partenope* that Handel did not complacently accept new aria texts. When dissatisfied with new verses, Handel modified the inserted text in the autograph by crossing out the new words and writing an alternative 'new' text above the stave. We may assume that Handel was personally responsible for these creative decisions, and it is significant that his re-drafted new texts consistently change our impression of a character's personality. Handel particularly wished to intervene in the characterisation of Emilio. In 'La speme ti consoli' (III.iii), the A section first

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<sup>326</sup> Dean agrees that 'Furibondo' is 'a much stronger aria than Stampiglia's at this point' (Ibid., p. 159).



concluded with the lines ‘dai nostri brandi soli, si cerchi un bell’ onor.’ Handel deleted this text, and wrote in his alternative: ‘Da te il timor sen voli, ti chiama un bell onor’. This makes a small yet significant difference: in the rejected version, Emilio suggested that he and Arsace both take up arms to retrieve their honour together, but this was precisely the kind of rash and war-thirsty attitude that already led Emilio to defeat and humiliation. It does not portray Emilio possessing new-learned wisdom, although that is the overall psychological trajectory of his character during the opera. In order to fit better with the portrayal of Emilio as a reformed gentleman, whose encouragement of Arsace is a sign of honour rather than impetuosity, Handel’s altered text illustrates one scorned Prince offering advice to another, but carefully clarifies that Emilio expects only Arsace to do any actual fighting. A very simple alteration by Handel to the new aria text enables Emilio to appear more credibly as a reformed villain who has no inclination to prove himself by the sword again.

In the 1708 source libretto Emilio is forgiven for his misdemeanours, but is not granted an opportunity to communicate his penitent change of heart in an aria. Handel strengthened the credibility of Emilio’s transformation, and consolidates the importance of the character’s function in the opera, by inserting a new aria text for him immediately prior to the *scena ultima* (‘La gloria in nobil alma’, III.ix). Dean praised the musical setting as ‘very effective, marked by intense energy ... and exuberant cross-rhythms’, but considered that Emilio’s final aria ‘is strictly superfluous’.<sup>327</sup> I disagree: ‘La gloria in nobil alma’ marks the complete transformation of Emilio from the ‘bluff extrovert’ to the friend and ally of those who were formerly his rivals and enemies, and its chivalrous text is one of the vital moral conclusions of the opera. In an opera otherwise short on conventionally virtuous heroism, Emilio emerges as the unlikely prime candidate as the hero of the opera. The dramatic importance of this scene is borne out by Handel’s evident care over the new

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

aria text. Again discontent with the first draft A section, the composer replaced it with a different text that makes a significant difference:

First Draft (Rejected)	Second Draft (Retained)
<p>Io cerco in nobil alma  La gloria e poi la calma  Chi sa? mi dara a cor  E fa contento il cor.</p>	<p>La gloria in nobil alma  Sa dar la bella calma    E fa contento il cor.</p>

For the final version of the text, Handel removed Emilio’s self-centred use of the first person, and made the rhetorical tone of the aria more didactic. Handel also reduced the stanza to three lines, repeating the last line twice in the music. This decision emphasizes Emilio’s conclusion that the true glory of a noble soul is achieved through calmness and a contented heart. It is a newly-learned moral that is the climax of Emilio’s path from proud lust to humble generosity, but he also extols this virtuous principle from having observed the contrasting fates of his two rival suitors: Arsace could have been spared from his suffering had he lived according to the moral of Emilio’s aria, but it is by this method that Armindo has successfully won Partenope’s love. Armindo’s final aria ‘Nobil core’ contains a consistent similar message. Handel’s newly inserted aria texts, and his subsequent alterations to them, clearly demonstrate the care he took over portraying Emilio as a character who evolves from a conventional *opera seria* villain into a gallant philosopher.

Another moral message is also delivered in a new text for Partenope in the final scene of the opera. Handel initially intended to follow the source libretto recitatives through to the end, albeit with a radically different final chorus text.<sup>328</sup> Handel composed the lines from Armindo and Emilio’s ‘Questa è la face’ up to Rosmira’s line ‘idolo mio

<sup>328</sup> The recitatives that form the bulk of the *scena ultima* in Handel’s version are remarkably similar to the source libretto. However, the 1708 Venice text contains no arias, and the final number (a sextet and chorus ‘Sei mio core’ in which the assembled cast join to pay tribute to Partenope) was replaced with the call for a double wedding in ‘D’Imeneo le belle Tede’. Caldara’s ensemble consolidates the affection between Armindo and Partenope; Arsace, Rosmira and Emilio express gratitude for her benevolence, and it concludes a *tutti* ‘Viva Partenope’. In contrast, Handel’s ‘D’Imeneo le belle Tede’ appears deliberately less sycophantic to Partenope, and immerses her with everybody else hoping for a happy future.



non m'è trar mai più' as continuous simple recitative, but then deleted them, rewrote the line for Armindo and Emilio on the next page, and changed their final cadence to allow for an aria.<sup>329</sup> After so much recitative, it is very likely Handel judged that the brightly philosophical aria 'Sì scherza sì' would enable the title-character to draw the drama to an appropriate conclusion. Handel's reconsidered plan for the final moments of the opera is a significant improvement on the perfunctory first draft. Dean points out that the inserted music 'winds up the story appropriately with a return to the carefree mood' of Partenope's whimsical happiness in the opening scene,<sup>330</sup> but the libretto text is equally significant. Partenope contributes a bittersweet observation - entirely absent from the source libretto - that is full of wisdom drawn from the experiences of all five principal characters in the opera. It serves as the opera's conclusive moral allegory: 'Content in love did never reign, Without an intermingled Pain.'<sup>331</sup>

The autograph of *Partenope* shows that Handel often had second thoughts about music that he had already composed. RM.20.b.11 f. 26r-27v contains the aria 'Io son ferito', which was Handel's first solution for Arsace's crucial reaction to Rosmira's rejection of him in I.ix.<sup>332</sup> However, it appears that Handel changed his mind about how to use this musical material before he had finished the opera: he crossed out the first six bars of 'Io son ferito' in ink, wrote a cue at the bottom 'l'aria Dimmi pietoso ciel', and inserted this newly composed alternative aria for Arsace after the end of the rejected aria. The musical material in 'Io son ferito' was instead adapted for the quartet 'Non è incauto' (III.i). Considering the radical difference between the musical style and tone of 'Io son ferito' and 'Dimmi pietoso Ciel', it is highly probable that Handel was dissatisfied with the characterization of Arsace offered by the new text 'Io son ferito' and decided to compose something better suited to the situation by reverting to the original aria text for this position

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<sup>329</sup> RM.20.b.11, ff. 101v-102r.

<sup>330</sup> Op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>331</sup> The final line of the aria text as printed in the 1730 wordbook.

<sup>332</sup> Neither the aria text (which is not derived from the source libretto) nor the music have been published before, and are included in Appendix 2c (libretto text) and 2d (music).

in the source libretto. The comparatively mournful tone of the text ‘Dimmi pietoso Ciel’ evidently reminded Handel of the aria ‘Fatemi o Cieli almen’, created almost a decade earlier for Zenobia in the second version of *Radamisto* (II.vi). As implied in the title of each aria, Zenobia and Arsace both implore Heaven to aid them and alleviate suffering. It is not coincidental that ‘Dimmi pietoso Ciel’ and its forerunner in *Radamisto* are both in minor keys, share identical scoring, and have almost identical opening statements. It was probably after this decision and the insertion of ‘Dimmi pietoso Ciel’ that Handel realized he could recycle the rejected aria’s initial musical motif in the Act III quartet.

Partenope’s aria ‘Qual farfalletta’ (II.vii) is an intriguing example of Handel’s second thoughts during the composition process. In RM.20.b.11, ‘Qual farfalletta’ appears out of position, but the first draft of this aria on ff. 62v - 64v reveals that Handel originally composed it for Emilio to sing in II.v, after he and Armindo have sung the recitative text ‘No other Flame I know, nor other lustre / Than that which dazles [sic] in my fair One’s Charms.’ The suitors’ reference to a flame influenced Handel to use material from his cantata *Tra le fiamme*, composed in Rome in or around July 1707. In the cantata, the singer’s heart is deceived by a charming beauty that plays for amusement among flames where butterflies perish. In Handel’s first draft, Emilio seems to be echoing the same sentiment regarding his obsessive love for Partenope. However, after Handel finished composing the aria, and probably when contemplating the important conversation between the perplexed Partenope and the shy lover Armindo two scenes later, he decided to relocate and transfer ‘Qual farfalletta’ to Partenope. Handel’s autograph reveals that he made numerous modifications to the vocal part. Although we cannot be absolutely certain that these were not part of the revisions made for Emilio’s original version, the musical content of the alterations and the visual impression that they were written over the original at a later stage makes it seem highly likely that the aria was remodelled in order to better fit the vocal lines to Strada’s voice. Handel also wrote in a new B section text to adapt the aria to its new context for Partenope.



Some smaller pieces of evidence about Handel's creative process also have significance. For example, he revised his opinion about how to deal with the context of Arsace's important climactic aria 'Furibondo spira il vento' at the end of Act II. RM.20.b.11 f. 71v shows that his first intention was to move straight from Rosmira's disdainful rejection of Arsace's oath that he loves her and vows to be faithful from now on ('I'll not believe thee, thou dissembling Traitor') to Arsace's aria. Handel started to sketch the opening bars of 'Furibondo' at the bottom of f. 71v, but very quickly decided to abandon this draft in favour of inserting a short recitative for Arsace that clarifies his expression of reeling rejection: 'Shame, Honour, Duty, Love and soft Compassion / Now combat with mix'd Tumult in my Heart.' After squeezing this explanatory recitative for Arsace in the available space on f. 71v, the composer started 'Furibondo' anew on f. 72r. It appears that he experienced second thoughts about how to deal with this scene within moments of writing the first draft. The autograph manuscript reveals that he first wrote out recitative texts, with blank staves ready for vocal and bass continuo parts to be inserted later on. Similarly on f. 51v we discover that Handel initially planned to set Emilio's soliloquy 'Contro un pudico amor' (II.ii) as a simple recitative, but upon reaching this scene he re-evaluated his solution: he crossed out the blank staves and recitative text in ink, and instead set the text as an accompanied recitative.

Throughout his life, Handel rarely left compositional sketches or extraneous materials revealing aspects of his working process. However, the autograph of *Partenope* features some short sketches and compositional aides. On f. 18v there are ten staves prepared in 12/8 and in F major for the opening of Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' (I.xiii), but only an upbeat and the first full bar of the first oboe part was written here. He instead left the rest of the page blank, but used it as scrap paper to write a few thematic fragments. There are two clear sketches of single lines that relate to music in *Partenope*: one stave has a new key signature (A major) and time signature (3/4) and corresponds with Partenope's 'Voglio amare' (II.iii).

Handel's Sketch on RM.20.b.11, f. 18v<sup>333</sup>



Judging from its violinistic content, it is unlikely that this is a sketch for Strada's vocal part. Curiously, this latter part of the sketch does not match identical material in Partenope's aria, which raises the possibility that Handel copied the musical fragment on f. 18v from an unidentified work by another composer. The other example found on the same folio is in 12/8 and in F major on the third stave, which suggests that it was a sketch for a small detail in Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' (it cannot be part of the same draft as the first oboe top stave because the parts do not fit together).

Handel adopted his customary practice of borrowing musical material originally written by other composers. Telemann's collection of chamber cantatas *Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst* was a particularly useful resource, and an older Hamburg connection is manifest in a duet from Keiser's *Claudius* forming the model for Ormonte's 'T'appresta forse amore' (I.vi).<sup>334</sup> The composition of *Partenope* was also an opportunity for Handel to recycle some of his own old music. In particular, Handel revised three arias that he had rejected from his autograph first draft of *Scipione* four years earlier: Rosalba's 'Generoso chi sol brama' was expanded, modified, and transposed to D major as Armindo's 'Nobil core' (III.v), Ernando's 'T'aspetta fuor dell'onde' was musically unchanged as Ormonte's

<sup>333</sup> In Handel's autograph, this sketch is written along one stave, with the last few notes compressed in the right hand margin. The insertion of rests is editorial (in Handel's score the gap between musical statements contains an illegible ink marking). In the example above I have replicated Handel's bar lines. The recto side contains an altered passage for Arsace's 'Sento amor' (Dean: Op. cit., p. 164).

<sup>334</sup> Handel based Arsace's 'Sento amor' (I.v), Emilio's 'Anch'io pugnar saprò' (I.x), Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' (I.xiii), Rosmira's 'Furie son dell'alma mia' (II.v), and Partenope's 'Si scherza sì' on cantatas from Telemann's *Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst* (for a detailed list of Handel's borrowings in *Partenope*, see Dean: Op. cit., pp. 504-5).



‘T’appresta forse amore’,<sup>335</sup> and Lucejo’s ‘Son pellegrino’ was adapted initially for Arsace’s unused aria ‘Io son ferito’ and then adapted for the quartet ‘Non è incauto’.<sup>336</sup> It is intriguing but probably coincidental that the music for these three arias was initially drafted in 1726, only a few months before Senesino and Swiney were gossiping that the Royal Academy of Music might produce *Partenope*. Another fascinating re-use of earlier material is the ritornello that Handel used in his first opera *Almira*, composed for Hamburg in 1704; it also appears in the aria ‘Sento che il Cio bambin’ which occurs midway through the cantata *Arresta il passo*, composed in Rome between Spring and Summer 1707; in 1730 Handel developed the ritornello for Emilio’s ‘Barbaro fato, sì’ (II.ii) and invested it with increased dramatic subtlety and musical complexity.

Although during the Second Academy years Handel often composed his new opera during the autumn prior to its production, it is unlikely that he gave his setting of *Partenope* much thought until after *Lotario* was completed on 16 November 1729.<sup>337</sup> According to Handel’s annotation in the autograph score, Act I was finished on 14 January 1730, one day after the last performance of *Lotario*. We do not know how quickly he composed Act II, but the rest of *Partenope* was presumably drafted, revised and completed during the nine-performance run of the revised *Giulio Cesare*.<sup>338</sup> Dean observed that Handel shortened a number of arias during the composition process, ‘generally to tighten up a more leisurely harmonic movement’.<sup>339</sup> Upon finishing Act III, and presumably after filling up the orchestration of arias and providing an overture, Handel signed and dated the end of the score: ‘Fine dell’ Opera / G. F. Handel / a Londres / ce 12 de Fevrier / 1730’.<sup>340</sup> If we make an approximate estimation based on what we know about Handel’s usually

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<sup>335</sup> Although it was already based on music by Keiser (see discussion above).

<sup>336</sup> Dean & Knapp: *Handel’s Operas 1704-1726*, p. 621, footnote 19.

<sup>337</sup> Burrows & Ronish: *A Catalogue of Handel’s Musical Autographs*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 42.

<sup>338</sup> It seems highly probable that rejected aspects of the first draft had already been copied into the conducting score, including Arsace’s unused ‘Io son ferito’ and Emilio’s version of ‘Qual farfalletta’, which indicates that Handel’s autograph score underwent several layers of revision (Dean: *Op cit.*, p. 166). The first draft of the opera did not include Arsace’s ‘O Eurimene’ and ‘Sento amor’, and the sinfonia and march in the battle scene (II.i) were probably both added after Handel had composed the rest of the opera (*Ibid.*, p. 163).

<sup>339</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>340</sup> Burrows & Ronish: *Op. cit.*, p. 49.

rapid rate of composition during this period of his life, and work backwards from the opera's date of completion, it is likely that *Partenope* was composed in about six to eight weeks.

### **The first performances of *Partenope* and its reception**

Only twelve days after finishing its autograph score, Handel first performed *Partenope* at the King's Theatre on 24 February 1730. One assumes that the singers had received copies of their new arias before Handel finished filling up the entire score, and that rehearsals could have started during the latter stages of the revival of *Giulio Cesare*. The rapidity of this process was not unusual: *Lotario* was first performed only four days after Handel had signed and dated its autograph score. The cast featured Strada in the title-role, with the castrato Bernacchi as Arsace. Merighi sang Rosmira, Fabri played Emilio, and Armindo was performed *en travesti* by Bertolli. Handel's boyhood acquaintance Riemschneider sang Ormonte, though was given less to contribute than he had done in *Lotario*.

Nothing is known about the contemporary reception of *Partenope*, which was performed seven times during its first run. This seems healthy compared to abject failures such as *Ezio* and *Serse* (only five performances each), and its prompt revival for another seven performances the following seasons perhaps makes it seem more popular, but these statistics appear much less successful if compared with the first runs of Handel's unequivocally successful operas during the first half of the 1730s, such as *Porro* (sixteen performances) and *Alcina* (eighteen performances). Whether seven performances of *Partenope* constitute success or failure depends, in the absence of further knowledge, on which author one elects to trust. Dent considered that 'Despite its many beauties, it was even less successful than *Lothario*. Handel's audience did not want to go to the theatre to listen to his music; they went to hear the singers, and Bernacchi, who was no longer a



young man, was a poor substitute for Senesino'.<sup>341</sup> Newman Flower made a similar assessment, compounded by incredible unsupported statements:

[Handel] deliberately tried to force upon London the very type of opera it least wanted. Again he rushed his music, and only completed the last act twelve days before the opera was produced. ... The public shrugged its shoulders, growled at Handel and his Italian antics, and kept aloof. The critics told Heidegger in so many words that he was partnered by an idiot.<sup>342</sup>

In contrast to such hyperbole, Stanley Sadie's measured understatement that *Partenope* 'was not particularly well received' has a greater impression of reliability. In 1969 Winton Dean judged that 'The score does not rank with Handel's finest',<sup>343</sup> and in the early 1980s he considered that the opera was not a success.<sup>344</sup> But by 2006 Dean seems to have become more moderate regarding both opinions, remarking that *Partenope* 'enjoyed a fair measure of success', and that its reception 'must have been fairly favourable'. In addition to his praise of characterization and music in the opera, Dean opined that 'This comprehensive vision of human nature as matter for laughter and tears, often in the same situation, is a quality that Handel shares with Mozart.'<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> *Handel*. Duckworth, London, 1934, p. 77.

<sup>342</sup> *George Frideric Handel: His Personality & His Times*, pp. 182-3.

<sup>343</sup> *Handel and the Opera Series*, p. 115.

<sup>344</sup> *The New Grove Handel*, Macmillan, London, 1982, p. 37.

<sup>345</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, pp. 156, 162. The comparison between *Partenope* and Mozart's *Così fan tutte* has been previously made in my own writings in *HJb* and for Chandos Records (see bibliography).

## Part Two: Description of the Three Versions of *Partenope*

### Sources

Handel's autograph manuscript (R.M.20.b.11) features several revisions made during the compositional process and the first performance version (1730a), and also contains some markings that relate to the 1730b and 1737 revivals.<sup>346</sup> The conducting score M A/1039 is in Smith's handwriting, with some inserted folios written by the copyist S1. There are annotations, instructions, and corrections in Handel's handwriting throughout the manuscript that relate to all three performing versions. Generally, the content corresponds to 1730a, but it also contains a lot of evidence about the 1737 revival (such as pasted slips, cuts, and inserted material). Very few of the 1730b alterations are still evident in this manuscript because they were masked by the changes made in 1737. However, the harpsichord score M A/1040 corresponds for the greater part to the 1730a and 1730b versions and contains none of the revisions made for the 1737 revival.<sup>347</sup> Although known as a so-called 'Cembalo' score, it is a full score, written by Smith, with inserted folios copied by S1, and featuring Handel's annotations. The score may principally have been kept as an archive copy, but it may also have been used during performances, the revision process, and rehearsals throughout 1730. All secondary manuscript copies contain the 1730a version, although the Barrett-Lennard copy (MU MS 845) might contain evidence of a revision made during the first run of performances.

An examination of the copyists and paper types in the music manuscripts does not enable dating of content because similar paper and the same copyists were used in 1730a, 1730b and 1737. Clarification of which elements belong to 1730b and 1737 are possible through cross-examination of Handel's naming of singers in the performing scores and the printed librettos. The first edition of the libretto was published in February 1730, but old stock was re-sold during the December 1730 revival (1730b), with an inserted page

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<sup>346</sup> For more information about the paper-conjunction and content see Burrows & Ronish: Op. cit., pp. 49-50. Dean's *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, pp. 163-4, contains a complementary concise description.

<sup>347</sup> Most of the revisions evident in M A/1039 and M A/1040 were listed in brief by Hans Dieter Clausen (*Händels Direktionspartituren (Handexemplare)*, pp. 193-6).



describing the changes made to the *scena ultima*. There is a unique surviving copy in Birmingham Central Library (ML A782.12 Plays B/39).<sup>348</sup> Another copy held by the Library of Congress (Washington D.C.) apparently also contained the inserted 1730b page at one time, but it is currently missing.<sup>349</sup> The title page of the 1737 libretto designates it as the third edition, which confirms that the makeshift 1730b libretto was considered as a legitimate second edition. A copy of the 1737 libretto in the Schoelcher Collection (Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. V. S. 416) contains several reallocated arias with adapted texts, and a new aria for Armindo ('Bramo restar'), but all of these were only summarized in English.<sup>350</sup>

### Handel's first version of *Partenope*, 1730a.

Appendix 2a illustrates each of Handel's performing versions of *Partenope*. For an opera with a reputation in Handel literature for being 'lighthearted',<sup>351</sup> it is perhaps surprising that Handel composed an overture that seems serious throughout, with all three movements in D minor. The autograph score of the overture is written on inserted folios, which led Dean to suggest that it 'may not have been written for this opera'.<sup>352</sup> I am not convinced: it would be unremarkable if Handel had written the overture last, and the tonality of D minor does not prevent the music from seeming to possess mock-solemnity – the ideal tone for leading into the ceremonial founding of Naples in the opening scene, and which is matched by the light-textured handling of the battle scene at the opening of Act II.

*Partenope* is one of half a dozen or so Handel operas that opens with an unusually spectacular tableau.<sup>353</sup> This is not portrayed through unusually spectacular music, but the importance of the visual aspect becomes apparent if we collate the stage directions from

<sup>348</sup> See Colin Timms: 'Handelian and other Librettos in Birmingham Central Library' in *ML*, April 1984, p. 145.

<sup>349</sup> During a personal visit to the Library of Congress the current whereabouts of the libretto could not be established.

<sup>350</sup> See Appendix 2c for my English translations of these texts.

<sup>351</sup> Burrows: *Handel*, pp. 130-1.

<sup>352</sup> Op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>353</sup> Dean: *Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 132-4.

the printed 1730 wordbook and Handel's autograph score: the opening scene is set at dawn, with 'part of the new city adorned with great solemnity'. There is an altar and a statue of Apollo 'surrounded by Priests, Nymphs, sacrificial victims, Partenope's cortege, and a numerous population.' The opera also concludes with another ceremony: the final chorus is the initiation of a double wedding, with the four lovers having finally found ideal spouses. The plot of *Partenope* has two general overall trajectories. Firstly, the progress from a public ceremony full of pomp (indicated by Handel's use of horns in the first chorus 'Viva Partenope') to a more intimate and perhaps more personal ceremony: political pride is supplanted by joy in love. Secondly, the opera opens at dawn and concludes with a call for torches in order for the two united couples to marry. If we assume that the reference to torches implies that night may have fallen during the *scena ultima*, it is possible to interpret the opera as a passage from dawn to dusk. Perhaps *Partenope* is designed to take place during the span of a single chaotic day, much like *Le nozze di Figaro*, during which a bright new dawn of established order (the founding of Naples and Partenope's contentment with Arsace) is threatened by emotional turmoil, romantic confusion and political upheaval (the arrival of Rosmira, her vendetta against Arsace, and Emilio's military campaign), but eventually resolved through the exposure of falsehoods and forgiveness.<sup>354</sup>

It is especially evident during the opera that the action is carefully organized, with thirty arias sensitively distributed between the five principal characters:<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Another curious coincidence with *Le nozze di Figaro* is that a large part of the final act of Handel's *Partenope* is set in a garden.

<sup>355</sup> *Partenope* has more arias than any of Handel's London operas except *Giulio Cesare* and *Serse* (which is also based on an old libretto by Stampiglia). Dean: *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 155. Dean's commentary on each character's arias (pp. 156-160) is an excellent introduction to the opera, although I disagree with several of his opinions about musical characterisation. For example, I do not share his view that Partenope and Rosmira are 'far stronger characters' than the leading men, and that the opera 'can be viewed as a psychological study of relations between the sexes seen largely from the woman's point of view' (p. 156). The flirtatious Partenope and fickle Rosmira are admittedly entertaining characters for a theatre audience, but neither female character is as profound in sorrow or joy as Arsace, Armindo or Emilio. Handel created an unusually equal balance between the sexes in *Partenope*.



Character	Number of arias in 1730a
Arsace	9
Partenope	8
Rosmira / 'Eurimene'	6
Emilio	4
Armando	3
Ormonte	1

Arsace, Partenope and Rosmira have the dominant share of arias, but this impression is solely statistical: Emilio and Armando both contribute more substantially than these figures imply, especially in protagonist actions, their prominent contribution to several ensembles, and the musical excellence of their arias. Unlike in many of Handel's London operas, there is no difference in musical quality or substance between the prima donna and the so-called 'secondary' characters. Artistically, even if not numerically, Handel creates an unusually level playing field for his characters to make a strong musico-dramatic impact. Dean rightly pointed out that 'Subtle characterisation is an outstanding feature of the score'.<sup>356</sup> Each aria marks an important stepping-stone in its character's progress from emotional turmoil (whether amorous unhappiness or unwitting ignorance) to the improved state of contented consciousness that they achieve at the end of the drama. Only Partenope's captain Ormonte is a standard 'secondary' character, with one aria and a simple (albeit vital) functional role. The other five characters each represent conflicting aspects of love. Each must learn a vital lesson before the drama is resolved:

- At the beginning of the opera, Partenope naïvely loves Arsace, and slowly recognizes that Armando is a more steadfast and trustworthy lover. In her final aria, she realizes that 'content in love did never reign without an intermingled pain'.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>357</sup> Translation from the 1730 first edition libretto.

- Arsace is forced to take the full consequences of his infidelity (humiliation and rejection). He atones for it through his acceptance of guilt, undergoes persecution, and eventually deserves to regain his true love.
- Initially justified and valiant, Rosmira becomes increasingly deceitful as the plot develops in order to both protect her identity and punish Arsace. She discovers that her obsession with revenge has made her bitter, and realizes that she still loves Arsace and must forgive him.
- The shy Armino is afraid to confess his love for Partenope, but his constancy and noble heart win him her love. Moments such as saving the Queen's life in the battle, and being the only suitor to gently reveal his love for her in a tender way, make Armino the clear best choice for Partenope.
- Previously an ungentlemanly bully, the defeated and shamed Emilio discovers that the true glory of a noble soul is found through reason and honour. Emilio's championing of Arsace and reconciliatory friendship with Armino, and the gradual 'improvement' of his moral character, make him an unforeseen hero.

The opera has only two accompanied recitatives, which are both concise and use simple sustained chords to support declamatory expression. It is notably unusual that neither is granted to the prima donna or *primo uomo*. This cannot be attributed to Handel's new leading singers lacking sufficient prowess, especially if we consider that he composed a striking *accompagnato* for Strada's first scene in *Lotario* only a few months before. However, both examples serve to emphasise significant life-changing moments of self-examination, during which its character expresses private turmoil in the midst of crisis. Emilio is humbled by his defeat in battle (II.ii); Partenope's aggressive imprisonment of him makes it clear that she will never love him. Left alone, the dishonoured and bitterly disappointed Emilio expresses anger, lamentation and shame in his powerful G minor aria 'Barbaro fato, sì'. Handel initially considered setting the preceding text 'Contro un pudico amor' as simple recitative, but instead changed his mind in order to give Emilio greater



prominence, gravity and dignity with a potently earnest *accompagnato*. Handel seemed to consider that this is a pivotal moment that instigates Emilio's subsequent change of heart. The only other accompanied recitative occurs when Rosmira finds the dejected Arsace sleeping (III.vii). In secrecy, she is able to speak her true feelings: she shows remorse for her vengeful hounding of Arsace, confesses that she still loves him, but fears that she cannot trust him.

In addition to its unusually broad balance between characters and high number of arias, *Partenope* has a remarkably prominent number of ensembles. Discounting the straightforward choruses that open and close the opera, there are another six ensembles:

	'Per te moro' (I.viii)	'Con valorosa' (II.i)	'Vi circonda la gloria' (II.i)	'E vuoi con dure' (II.iv)	'Non è incauto' (III.i)	'Un cor infedele' (III.viii)
Partenope	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Arsace	✓	Coro	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rosmira / 'Eurimene'		Coro	✓	✓		✓
Emilio		✓			✓	
Armando		Coro	✓		✓	
Ormonto		Coro	✓			

Most of these contain distinctive solo lines for some or all participants, and each contributes directly to the action. 'Per te moro' at first seems like a rapturous love duet for Arsace and Partenope. Accompanied only by continuo, its musical tone is a parody of the fully-fledged orchestrated love duets one finds in many of Handel's operas.<sup>358</sup> But the duet breaks off after only four bars, swiftly abandoned when the embarrassed Arsace sees Rosmira coming and does not want to be caught embracing Partenope. 'Con valorosa mano' has short solos for Partenope and Emilio, each encouraging their own armies prior to battle, with a choral refrain at its conclusion. After the battle, 'Vi circonda la gloria' is a jaunty triple-time chorus featuring solo trumpet in which each of the five victors has a short solo (the defeated captive Emilio remains silent). 'E vuoi con dure tempre' is the only

<sup>358</sup> Many of the best examples of 'serious' love duets were created to end Acts of Royal Academy operas, such as 'Ah mia cara' (Act I of *Floridante*), 'Io t'abbraccio' (Act II of *Rodelinda*) and 'Se il cor ti perde' (Act II of *Tolomeo*).

fully developed duet, but it is not the conventional expression of either joy or anguish at parting between two lovers that is common in Handel's operas. Instead, the duet has distinct contrast between its singers, and is certainly not a duet consisting of two equal or interwoven vocal contributions: 'E vuoi con dure tempre' is rather more like an aria for the pleading Arsace, during which Rosmira takes over the music with her indignant and unchanging response 'infido, ingrato!'

The short quartet 'Non è incauto' opens Act III, and cleverly contrasts Arsace's anxiety at the impending revelation of his sordid past to Partenope (who is attempting to cheer him up), and Armindo and Emilio, who each wistfully envy the supposedly fortunate Arsace. The contrasting characterisations blended into a coherent and notably courtly ensemble may not seem particularly complex or musically ambitious compared to famous examples from nineteenth-century grand opera such as the quartet 'Bella figlia dell'amore' from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, but the same basic compositional principle of using varied thematic material to portray conflicting dramatic intentions through coherent musical form is functioning in the *Partenope* quartet. The trio 'Un cor infedele' (III.viii) functions differently: Partenope pours scorn on Arsace, who struggles to keep his secret vow never to reveal Rosmira's identity; Rosmira – still disguised as Eurimene - responds by merely echoing the angered Queen. The lack of musical individuality for Rosmira's voice in this trio may be explained as a subtle musico-dramatic device: she does not dare contribute an individual voice because Arsace has just unwittingly hinted at her true identity in front of the eavesdropping Partenope. Also, Rosmira will not risk becoming too excitably critical of Arsace because the last time she did so Partenope sent her to prison. In a subtly entangled emotional situation, Rosmira is now perhaps more afraid than Arsace.

All of the compositional methods Handel used for his ensembles in *Partenope* are evident elsewhere in his output. For example, *Orlando* has an exquisite trio, and there are notable quartets in *Radamisto*, *Semele*, and *Jephtha*. However, it is uncommon to find such



a variety of dramatically effective ensembles within one opera.<sup>359</sup> Karin Zauft compared the ensembles in *Partenope* to later reforms by Gluck and Mozart's Da Ponte operas, but it is tenuous to suggest that the *Partenope* ensembles are anything more than a coincidental chronological precedent.<sup>360</sup> Indeed, Handel's use of an old Neapolitan libretto written in 1699, even if in a version adjusted for Venice a few years later, makes the number of ensembles and the brevity of arias appear like a throwback to seventeenth-century Venice rather than an innovative precursor of late eighteenth-century Vienna.

### The 'Senesino' revival of *Partenope*, 1730b

Handel promptly revived *Partenope* after the popular castrato Senesino returned to London and replaced Bernacchi in the opera company at the King's Theatre. This decision is perhaps an indication that the composer held *Partenope* in high esteem, and wanted to give it a second chance before the opera-going public. The revived version of the opera was performed another seven times between 12 December 1730 and 9 January 1731, which was a respectably high number for a revival.<sup>361</sup> Handel's reorganization of the score featured a relatively limited number of small alterations:

- I.iii            Arsace's 'O Eurimene' transposed down a tone from G to F.
- I.v             Arsace's 'Sento amor' transposed down a tone from E to D.
- I.vi            Ormonte's 'T'appresta forse amore' cut.
- I.xiii          Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' shortened, with introductory ritornello reduced from eighteen to four bars.
- II.vi           Arsace's 'Poterti dir vorrei' transposed down a tone from G to F.
- II.ix           Arsace's 'Furibondo spira il vento' transposed down a tone from E minor to D minor.

<sup>359</sup> Dean observed that no other Handel opera contains both a trio and a quartet (*Handel and the Opera Seria*, p. 114-5).

<sup>360</sup> 'Händels Opernensemble - Ausdruck einer neuen Musikdramatik im 18. Jahrhundert, dargestellt an Beispielen aus der Oper *Partenope*' in *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper*, Laaber-Verlag, 1990.

<sup>361</sup> Appendix 1a shows that the majority of revived old operas within the scope of this thesis fared worse, such as *Tamerlano* (its only revival under Handel in 1731-2 was only performed three times), or *Ottone* (only four performances in 1733-4).

III.viii	Arsace's 'Fatto è amor' cut.
III.ix	Entire scene cut (including Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma').
<i>Scena ultima</i>	Sinfonia added at the beginning.
	Partenope's 'Sì scherza sì' cut.
	New aria inserted for Arsace ('Seguaci di Cupido').

Almost all of Handel's alterations for the 1730b version of *Partenope* were made to accommodate Senesino. The downward transposition of four arias indicate that Senesino had a slightly lower *tessitura* than the departed Bernacchi, but it is curious to note that Handel did not revise the bulk of Arsace's role more extensively. Perhaps the vocal writing in the transposed arias, and the remainder of the original role, suited Senesino's strengths as a performer without requiring further adjustments. Only one of Arsace's 1730a arias was cut, but the omission of 'Fatto è amor' is not the straightforward shortening of the opera that it might seem. Judging from Handel's retention of all Arsace's other arias in 1730b, the suitability of music that had been composed for Bernacchi cannot have been a substantial problem for Senesino.<sup>362</sup> It is curious that the music of 'Fatto è amor' was used in the 1731 revival of *Rinaldo* performed a few months later,<sup>363</sup> when it was transposed up for Merighi (in the role of Armida) and given the parody text 'Fatto è Giove'.<sup>364</sup> It is tempting to speculate that Handel might have omitted the aria from *Partenope* because he had already decided to use it in *Rinaldo*, but this hypothesis implies remarkably unusual foresight on Handel's part. It is unlikely Handel spent much time planning the revival of *Rinaldo* so far in advance. In fact, the re-use of 'Fatto è amor' in *Rinaldo* probably owes something to the fact it had been omitted from *Partenope* and was spare music readily available for such adaptation. Although 'Fatto è amor' is a dramatic climax of significant potency in the original 1730a scheme of *Partenope*, it is likely that Handel cut it after he

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<sup>362</sup> It is unlikely that 'Fatto è amor' did not suit Senesino's voice. Handel's Royal Academy operas contain many such animated heroic-rage arias in minor keys composed for Senesino.

<sup>363</sup> See Appendix 1a Figure 2.

<sup>364</sup> Dean & Knapp: *Handel's Operas 1704-1726*, p. 189.



decided to insert a new aria for Senesino in the final scene. It would not have been either musically or dramatically expedient for Senesino to perform two climactic *coloratura* arias in quick succession.

With the removal of III.ix, including Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma', Handel excised a sizeable chunk of music from the last stages of *Partenope*. With the action now leading from the trio 'Un cor infedele' straight to the *scena ultima*, Handel avoided a potentially awkward leap in the action by inserting a short new sinfonia featuring solo trumpet that smoothly joins the scenes, and also colourfully establishes the setting for the forthcoming duel and final confrontation between Arsace and 'Eurimene'. Based on a spectacular aria sung by the title-hero in *Riccardo Primo* ('Atterrato il muro cada'), but with the texture simplified for its new context, it is noteworthy that the new sinfonia is based on music that Senesino had sung three years before at a moment portraying a decisive heroic man of action. One wonders whether Handel was consciously illustrating that Arsace's luck was about to change thanks to the beleaguered lover's cunning yet assertive decision. Was the addition of this sinfonia a strategy to make the hapless Arsace seem more heroic by deliberately echoing a moment from one of Senesino's most overtly heroic roles?<sup>365</sup>

In 1730b, Arsace's victory over Rosmira in their battle of wits is consolidated with his new aria 'Seguaci di Cupido'. Handel based this on Stampiglia's text 'Amanti voi, che andate' that he had rejected from its original position at the end of Act II in the source libretto (see pp. 84-5). Handel initially set this new music to a text more closely modelled on Stampiglia's original, but its revision in the autograph score is evidence that the composer, and perhaps also Senesino, wished to take care over the meaning and impact of

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<sup>365</sup> In *Riccardo Primo* this music is described as a 'Bellicosa Sinfonia', and Suzana Ograjenšek described that it is 'a war symphony accompanying the advance of Riccardo's army, using the military key of D major and trumpets alongside oboes. Riccardo's vocal line at times adopts gestures typical of military instruments. The aria has only an A section, after which the symphony is repeated.' (Op. cit., p. 267). It is strange that Handel replaced an aria for Senesino's character in the 1730b version of *Partenope* with music that that portrayed the castrato in a notably heroic manner three years previously. Perhaps the reduced scoring and context of the music in *Partenope* suggests that the composer was making a humorous observation that on this occasion Senesino's character was advancing to a less glorious type of heroic triumph.

the new insertion.<sup>366</sup> Whilst Stampiglia's location for this text is emotionally unlikely and dramatically premature, Handel's position for it after all the conflicts have been resolved, just before the final chorus, is a neat and appropriate way to mark Arsace's full reconciliation and reunion with Rosmira. However, in order to allow room for Arsace's rejoicing that he will never find a more faithful love than his first (i.e. Rosmira), Handel cut Partenope's last aria 'Sì scherza sì'. Never performed again after 1730a, Partenope's conclusion to proceedings was sacrificed in order to give greater prominence to Senesino. However, a simple swap of Partenope's old 'Sì scherza sì' for Arsace's new 'Seguaci di Cupido' was not possible owing to the content of the recitatives. Appendix 2b illustrates that Partenope's aria text is omitted, and that after Armindo and Emilio's line 'Che in te scintilla, e che sgomenta Arsace' she instead proceeds with the same recitative as in 1730a. No adjustments to the next few lines of existing recitative were necessary because Arsace's new aria 'Seguaci di Cupido' was inserted as a response to Rosmira's last line 'Idolo mio non mi tradir mai più.'

Only two changes evident in 1730b had no connection with Senesino. Ormonte's aria 'T'appresta forse amore' was cut; Handel did not assign the new bass Commano with anything more taxing than recitatives throughout the 1730-1 season, which implies that Commano was a weak singer. Handel's other alteration to *Partenope* performed in 1730b is more difficult to date precisely: the flamboyant eighteen-bar introduction to Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero', scored for two horns in F, two oboes and four-part strings, was abridged to only four bars.<sup>367</sup> Although it is possible that this was undertaken before the first performance, evidence of the full-length eighteen bar version in both performing scores suggests that the long version was performed in at least some of the opera's first run of performances. The Barrett Lennard manuscript of *Partenope* contains the 1730a text of the opera but has only the shorter ritornello of 'Io seguo sol fiero', which increases the

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<sup>366</sup> See Appendix 2c.

<sup>367</sup> Only the short version is published in HG; the full eighteen-bar version is included in Appendix 2d.



possibility that the aria was shortened during the opera's first run.<sup>368</sup> But the copyist who prepared the Barrett Lennard manuscript might have been confused about the original organization of the music (or uninterested): Arsace's recitative before 'Poterti dir vorrei' was copied in its adjusted version allowing for Senesino's transposed version, but the aria itself was copied in the original key.<sup>369</sup> It is only certain that the ritornello of 'Io seguo sol fiero' was abridged when last used in 1730b.<sup>370</sup>

### Handel's last *Partenope*, 1737

Although it is difficult to determine what kind of reception *Partenope* received in London, it was disseminated remarkably quickly across Germany. There were performances at Brunswick in February 1731 (only a few weeks after Handel's 1730b revival finished in London), and again the following September at the Court theatre of Salztal (the summer residence of Elisabeth Sophie Marie of Brunswick) to celebrate a royal birthday. Handel's score was also performed as part of Emperor Karl VI's birthday celebrations at Wolfenbüttel in 1732.<sup>371</sup> Reinhard Keiser – Handel's former employer, and without doubt a major influence on his early musical development - adapted *Partenope* for the Hamburg opera house in 1733, where it remained in the repertory until 1736.<sup>372</sup> These German productions of *Partenope* were presumably undertaken without personal involvement from the composer.<sup>373</sup>

Handel's last revival of *Partenope* was an extensive revision prepared for four performances at Covent Garden between 29 January and 9 February 1737. As discussed in Chapter 1, the 1736-7 season was remarkably ambitious in its aggressive competition with the Opera of the Nobility, who had supplanted Handel at the King's Theatre after the end

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<sup>368</sup> Cfm MU MS 845 p. 55.

<sup>369</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>370</sup> See Appendix 1a footnote 27.

<sup>371</sup> *Deutsch*: pp. 271, 277, 296 and 335.

<sup>372</sup> With twenty-two performances between October 1733 and 1736, *Partenope* was performed more often in Hamburg than in London during the 1730s (Dean: Op. cit., p. 163). For a short description of the overall content of these German revivals, see Ibid. p. 165.

<sup>373</sup> Although Handel might have assisted by providing a score. The German revivals of *Partenope* have not yet been investigated.

of the 1733-4 season. His cast included only two singers who had sung in the opera in 1730a/b: Strada retained the title role, but Bertolli was promoted from Armindo to Rosmira; the cast was completed by Annibali (who sang Arsace at the same pitch as Bernacchi had in 1730a), Conti (for whom the role of Armindo was redesigned), the English tenor John Beard (Emilio) and Maria Caterina Negri (for whom the role of Ormonte was transposed and adjusted).

The 1737 version of *Partenope* has never been published, although many of its compressed recitatives preserved in the conducting score M A/1039 were preferred to the full-length 1730a texts by Chrysander in *HG*. Using M A/1039 and the 'Third edition' printed libretto, it is possible to discover the many alterations that Handel made for his 1737 version of *Partenope*:<sup>374</sup>

- I.i                Seven lines of recitative cut from *Partenope*.
- I.ii              Six lines of recitative cut (three each from *Partenope* and *Rosmira*).
- I.iii             Four lines of recitative cut (one each from *Arsace*, *Armindo*, *Partenope* and *Ormonte*); *Arsace*'s 'O Eurimene' restored to G major.
- I.iv              Nine lines of recitative cut (six from *Rosmira*, three from *Armindo*); *Armindo*'s 'Voglio dire' transposed up a fifth from E minor to B minor.
- I.v               Recitative between *Arsace* and *Rosmira* compressed: nineteen lines cut (eleven from *Arsace*, eight from *Rosmira*); *Arsace*'s 'Sento amor' cut.
- I.vi              Three lines of recitative cut (one from *Partenope*, two from *Ormonte*); *Ormonte*'s 'T'appresta forse amore' reinstated in its original position, but 1730a bass vocal part recomposed for alto Negri.
- I.vii             Six lines of recitative cut (five from *Armindo*, one from *Partenope*); new aria 'Bramo restar' inserted for *Armindo*
- I.ix              Fifteen lines of recitative cut (seven from *Rosmira*, four from *Partenope*, four from *Arsace*).
- I.x               Sixteen lines of recitative cut (ten lines from Emilio, six from *Partenope*).

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<sup>374</sup> See Appendix 2a.



- I.xi                      Nine lines of recitative cut (three from Armindo, and two each from Partenope, Ormonte and Rosmira); Act I now ends with Partenope's aria 'Io ti levo'.
- I.xii-xiii                Cut (twenty-seven lines of recitative and two arias: Arsace's 'E' figlio il mio timore' and Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero').
- II.i                        Six lines of recitative cut (four from Emilio, two from Partenope)
- II.ii (1730a/b)          Cut (Emilio's soliloquy: nine lines of recitative and aria 'Barbaro fato, sì').
- II.ii (1737)              Thirty-one lines of recitative cut (twelve from Partenope, eight from Rosmira, six from Emilio, two each from Arsace and Armindo, one from Ormonte).
- II.iv (1737)             Nine lines of recitative cut (five from Rosmira, three from Armindo, one from Emilio); Armindo's 'Sì scherza sì', transferred from Partenope's 1730a aria (Act III *scena ultima*), with parody text.
- II.v (1737)              Six lines of recitative cut (four from Arsace, two from Partenope); Arsace's 'Poterti dir vorrei' restored to original 1730a key (G major).
- II.vi (1737)             Fourteen lines of recitative cut (seven each from Armindo and Partenope).  
Armindo's 'Non chiedo o luci vaghe' transposed up a third from D minor to F sharp minor.
- II.vii (1737)            Two lines of recitative cut from the end of the scene (one each from Armindo and Rosmira), and replaced by one new line of recitative for Armindo; Act II now ends with Armindo's 'Barbaro fato, sì', transferred from Emilio (II.ii, 1730a/b), transposed up a tone from G minor to A minor.
- II.ix                      Original last scene for Rosmira and Arsace entirely cut (ten lines of recitative and Arsace's 'Furibondo spira il vento').
- III.iii (1730a/b)        Cut (twenty-one lines of recitative and Emilio's 'La speme ti consoli').
- III.iii (1737)            Twenty lines of recitative cut (twelve from Rosmira, eight from Arsace).
- III.iv (1737)            'Furibondo spira il vento' inserted for Ormonte, transferred from Arsace (II.ix, 1730a/b), in original 1730a key of E minor, but with parody text; Armindo's 'Nobil core' cut, replaced by 'La speme ti consola' (transferred from Emilio, III.iii, 1730a/b), transposed up a tone from G to A.

- III.vii (1737) Six lines of recitative cut prior to trio 'Un cor infedele' (three from Partenope, two from Rosmira, one from Arsace).
- III.viii (1737) 1730a III.ix reinstated (featuring Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma'), but recitative adjusted into a soliloquy for Emilio.
- Scena ultima* Thirty-four lines of recitative cut from *scena ultima* (1730b scheme).

Dean observed that 'Handel had two objectives, to shorten the opera and to provide a substantial part for Conti'.<sup>375</sup> To achieve the first objective, five scenes were entirely removed, and recitatives were cut in nineteen others. Out of a total of twenty-seven scenes in 1737, only five short scenes were left intact and unaltered from 1730a/b.<sup>376</sup> The omission of the last two scenes of Act I certainly helped Handel to shorten the opera, but the choice to end the Act I with Partenope's lilting aria 'Io ti levo' is weak compared to the original 1730a/b climax with Rosmira's hunting aria 'Io seguo sol fiero'. There is no reason to believe that Bertolli could not have sung the vocal part originally composed for Merighi; it is probable that Handel brought forward the end of Act I because horns were not available for his performances of *Partenope* in 1737.

To achieve the second objective, Handel used several methods: transposition of Armindo's existing role, insertion of music new to *Partenope*, and transferring music from other characters and relocating it to prominent positions in the drama. The soprano castrato Conti had a much higher voice than the contralto Bertolli, which required two of Armindo's 1730a/b arias to be transposed ('Voglio dire' up a fifth, and 'Non chiedo luci e vaghe' up a third). It is surprising that Handel decided to cut Armindo's joyful final aria 'Nobil core' in 1737, but perhaps an upward transposition did not suit Conti's voice. Although Armindo gained four 'new' arias in 1737 using old music, only one was new to *Partenope*: 'Bramo restar' (I.vii), a parody text set to 'Come se ti vedrò' from *Muzio Scevola*, was effectively placed after the shy Armindo has bid Partenope 'addio'.

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<sup>375</sup> Op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>376</sup> I.viii, III.i-ii and III.vi-vii (numbered v-vi in 1737) were unchanged. On these grounds alone, the 1737 *Partenope* is Handel's most extensive revision within the scope of this thesis.



Armindo's three other additional 1737 arias were all transferred from other characters and repositioned to facilitate Conti's increased contribution: Partenope's aria 'Si scherza sì', unused since the last scene of the 1730a version, was inserted for Armindo (in II.v, which had previously contained an aria only for Rosmira). Neither the soprano vocal part originally written for Strada, nor the libretto text summing up the moral of the opera in 1730a, were adjusted for the music's new context and character in 1737. Two arias were transferred from Emilio, whose contribution in 1737 was decimated. The rage aria 'Barbaro fato, sì' was inserted at the end of II.vii, where it now formed the conclusion of Act II. This alteration was presumably made too late for inclusion in the printed wordbook, which ends Act II with Partenope's aria 'Qual farfalletta'. This would have been a strangely gentle and light-hearted way to end the middle Act of an opera, most uncharacteristic of Handel, especially when he was otherwise going to such lengths to increase the prominence and heroism of Conti's role. Winton Dean is cautious about this point in his recent study of *Partenope*,<sup>377</sup> but M A/1039 provides unambiguous evidence that Armindo performed 'Barbaro fato, sì', transposed up to A minor and with a short linking recitative, at the end of Act II in 1737.<sup>378</sup> Lastly, Armindo was given Emilio's lyrical aria 'La speme ti consoli' (III.iii, 1730a/b) to sing in III.iv (1737), instead of 'Nobil core'. The accompaniment was transposed up a tone from G to A major, which suggests that Conti sang the vocal part a ninth higher than Fabri had in 1730a/b. The text was minimally altered, with Emilio's encouraging use of the second person towards Arsace was replaced by Armindo using the text to describe his own situation in the first person ('La speme mi consola').

The alto castrato Annibali did not receive any additions or new alterations in the role of Arsace. Handel used the 1730b scheme of the *scena ultima*, including Senesino's additional aria 'Seguaci di Cupido', but otherwise Annibali preferred the music at Bernacchi's 1730a pitch. Although two of the four arias transposed down a tone for

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<sup>377</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>378</sup> See Appendix 2a footnote 29.

Senesino in 1730b were omitted, the remaining two were restored to their original key in 1737. There seems little doubt that Arsace's climactic aria 'Furibondo spira il vento' (along with the rest of II.ix, 1730a/b) was only removed in order to allow Conti's Armindo a prominent virtuoso rage aria at the end of Act II in 1737, but we might speculate that the music did not suit Annibali's voice or artistic temperament. Handel seems to have been reluctant to waste the music of 'Furibondo' in his 1737 revival of *Partenope*, but rather than invent an opportunity for Arsace to sing it in a different position, he devised an unlikely new context for it by assigning it to Ormonte (in III.iv, 1737), where the Captain of Partenope's guards contributes an incongruously intense reaction to his acceptance of Partenope's orders for him to prepare for the forthcoming duel between Arsace and 'Eurimene'. Only the B section text is altered from Arsace's original text expressing turmoil that verges on madness. Rather than speculate why Handel decided to give this prominent musical outburst to the competent contralto Maria Caterina Negri, it is more curious to instead wonder why he did not leave it with Annibali. However, the sources give us no indication of whether 'Furibondo' was adapted for Ormonte because it was spare material that Handel did not want to waste after cutting it from the end of Act II, or whether it was transferred from Arsace because of musical issues on Annibali's part. After having no arias in 1730b, the reinstatement of 'T'appresta forse amore' (I.vi) makes Ormonte's role a little more musically prominent in 1737. An autograph copy of 'T'appresta forse amore' in the Fitzwilliam Museum, with only the basso continuo line and a vocal part written in the alto clef, reveals that Handel recomposed the vocal part in 1737 but left the orchestral parts unaltered.<sup>379</sup>

It seems safe to assert that Handel removed Emilio's two arias 'Barbaro fato, sì' and 'La speme ti consoli' in order to furnish Armindo with extra material. The drastic reduction of Emilio's role could not have been enforced by any other obvious factor, and it is certain that it had no connection to vocal or theatrical incompetence on the part of the

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<sup>379</sup> Cfm MU MS 257 pp. 53-4. The unpublished 1737 alto version of the vocal part is compared with the 1730a bass version in Appendix 2d.



young English tenor John Beard: having made his theatre debut for Handel in *Il Pastor Fido* at Covent Garden in November 1734, Beard was a mainstay of Handel's company by 1737, by which time Handel had composed substantial roles and demanding music for him in *Ariodante*, *Alcina*, *Alexander's Feast* and *Atalanta*. Furthermore, during the 1736-7 season he was granted noteworthy secondary parts in all of Handel's three new operas. Some of this 1737 music, such as Vitaliano's arias in *Giustino*, required a high level of light agility, fluent *coloratura* and range not unlike the music Handel composed for Fabri in *Lotario*, *Partenope* and *Porro*. Dean's comment that 'Emilio retained only one of his original four arias'<sup>380</sup> appears reasonable if we trust the 1737 third edition printed libretto, but that outcome is peculiar in context of Handel's working relationship with John Beard by 1737. While it is possible that Beard sang only Emilio's first aria ('Anch'io pugnar saprò', I.x), this produces an imbalance in the musical planning, and the lack of an aria in Act III showing Emilio's moral transformation creates a dissatisfying and lopsided characterization.

M A/1039 contains evidence that Handel might have been aware of the need to restore at least a little musical and dramatic balance to John Beard's contribution. Emilio's final aria 'La gloria in nobil alma', along with its preceding exchange of recitatives with his reconciled rival Armindo, was cut in 1730b, but M A/1039 features an alternative shortened solo recitative for Emilio, partly in Handel's own handwriting, which leads into 'La gloria in nobil alma'. This was presumably prepared in order to turn the scene into a soliloquy for Emilio.<sup>381</sup> The possibility that this alternative version of the scene was prepared during the opera's first run of performances - or intended for 1730b but discarded - is reduced by the absence of the short version, or any sign of its possible existence, in M A/1040: this performing score generally contains all of the 1730a/b content of the opera, and therefore shows that the full version of III.ix including Armindo's recitative was

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<sup>380</sup> Op. cit., p. 160.

<sup>381</sup> Chrysander elected to publish only the shorter soliloquy version of Emilio's recitative. Dean considered that this alternative version was prepared during the first run of performances (Ibid., p. 167).

performed in 1730a, and omitted completely in 1730b according to the specific description printed on the inserted page in the Birmingham copy of the libretto.<sup>382</sup> On the other hand, the physical condition of these pages in M A/1039 – which contains all of the 1737 revisions and has presumably remained unaltered since then – invites doubt that ‘La gloria in nobil in alma’ was crossed out, sewn together, or pasted over during Handel’s last performances of *Partenope*.

I propose that Handel prepared the alternative version of Emilio’s scene for the 1737 version of *Partenope*. The removal of Armindo’s 1730a alto lines was the exact method necessary for Handel to reinstate ‘La gloria in nobil alma’ in 1737 without fuss: the inclusion of Armindo’s lines would have demanded re-composition, or at least fiddly alteration, for Conti. Its omission from the 1737 libretto is insufficient argument against its inclusion, not least because it has already been demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that the printed wordbook fails to include all of Handel’s 1737 alterations accurately.<sup>383</sup> Furthermore, the omission of Emilio’s ‘La gloria in nobil alma’ from the libretto was probably a mistake caused by its probable preparation by typesetters during autumn 1736, when Handel was planning to assign it to Conti in the 1736 revival of *Poro*.<sup>384</sup> This plan was aborted after Annibali arrived at London in October 1736, in ample time for Handel to prepare the title role in *Poro* for him instead. Conti, recast as Alessandro, no longer required ‘La gloria in nobil alma’.<sup>385</sup> With the aria now surplus to requirement in *Poro*, Handel was at liberty to reinstate it for John Beard in *Partenope*: it is worth remembering that Handel took special care over the characterization of this text during the composition process seven years earlier. Its reinstatement probably occurred too late for the typesetters to include it in the printed libretto of *Partenope*, which was presumably prepared towards

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<sup>382</sup> Colin Timms: ‘Handelian and other Librettos in Birmingham Central Library’, *ML*, April 1984, p. 145.

<sup>383</sup> In particular, the omission of Armindo’s ‘Barbaro fato, sì’ from the end of Act II (see pp. 109-110).

<sup>384</sup> The *Poro* conducting score, MA/1042, has the faint pencil annotation ‘La Gloria – Partenope’, on f. 15v at the top of the page, next to Poro’s original aria ‘Vedrai con tuo periglio’ (I.ii). See Cummings: *Op. cit.*, p. 462, Table 1.

<sup>385</sup> Dean remarked in his recent study of *Partenope* that Conti sang ‘La gloria in nobil alma’ in the December 1736 revival of *Poro* (*Op. cit.*, p. 163), but this is incorrect: this plan was aborted after Handel decided to give the title role to Annibali instead; the aria was not incorporated into Conti’s eventual role of Alessandro.



the end of 1736. Another decisive factor in 'La gloria in nobil alma' being reinstated the 1737 revival of *Partenope* is that Beard had already sung it for Handel on-stage in *Oreste* (1734). The combination of these factors makes it difficult to conclude that Beard did not sing it again three years later.

## Chapter 3 *Arianna in Creta* (HWV 32)

### Part One: The Creation of Handel's *Arianna in Creta*

#### Aspects of the libretto

After Handel's return from Oxford to London in July 1733 he composed *Arianna in Creta* in advance of the next King's Theatre season. The title role was written for the soprano Anna Maria Strada del Pò, the only member of the previous season's company who remained loyal to Handel. The rest of the cast was an entirely new company of singers: Giovanni Carestini (Teseo, mezzo-soprano castrato), Carlo Scalzi (Alceste, soprano castrato), Maria Caterina Negri (Carilda, contralto), Margherita Durastanti (Tauride, mezzo-soprano) and Gustavus Waltz (Minos and probably Il Sonno, bass). Despite its title, the plot of Handel's opera revolves around the heroic mission of the Athenian prince Teseo to overturn the barbaric tribute of human sacrifice that Athens must pay to Crete. He accomplishes this by defeating the Minotaur in the labyrinth at Knossos, but with essential aid from his lover Arianna (the daughter of Minos, the king of Crete). The plot of Handel's opera is expanded by Arianna's jealous misunderstandings of Teseo's actions, the Cretan warrior Tauride's enmity towards Teseo, and the Athenian victim Carilda's eventual love for her steadfast compatriot Alceste. The action is complicated by Tauride's lust for Carilda, and the latter's unrequited initial love for Teseo.<sup>386</sup>

*Arianna in Creta* presents a moral allegory that steadfast love shall overcome barbarism. This is explicitly stated in the opera's opening scene: the 1734 printed libretto contains a stage direction that describes how 'The Stone, on which is engraven the Agreement of Athens, falls down and breaks to Pieces. Four Cupids fly thro' the Air' during a short sinfonia. The ascendant four Cupids represent love, whilst the broken marble tablet on which the cruel agreement between Athens and Crete is engraved

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<sup>386</sup> For a detailed synopsis see Dean: *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, pp. 256-8.



represents the destruction of old enmity. Reinhard Strohm suggested that this moral allegory outlined in the sinfonia (I.i) is ‘the keystone of the whole construction of the opera’ from a dramaturgical point of view.<sup>387</sup> Winton Dean dismissed Strohm’s idea as ‘surely far-fetched. It certainly symbolizes the fall of the tablet and the rise of the Cupids; but a fall followed by a rise is one of the commonest of overall operatic designs. Handel not only composed it as an afterthought but soon cut it.’<sup>388</sup> In this instance Strohm’s reasoned ideas are more convincing than Dean’s dismissive gloss over the matter. It is not conclusive that the sinfonia was a mere ‘afterthought’, and its insertion during the composition process shows Handel pondered the matter and decided in favour of introducing a significant new element to the scene. Furthermore, there are potential reasons for its removal in 1734b that owe nothing to dissatisfaction with the allegorical action of the four Cupids destroying the stone tablet.<sup>389</sup>

The idea that love is supremely victorious over adversity is a stock *opera seria* convention, but its commonness does not reduce its intellectual validity or dramatic effectiveness. The concept is reflected in Teseo and Arianna’s transcendence of the barbaric circumstances in which they find their love for each other,<sup>390</sup> and also serves as an apt motto for Alceste’s steadfast relationship with Carilda, who initially disdains him. It also explains why the conceited yet ultimately impotent Tauride is destined to failure in his pursuit of Carilda. The two pairs of lovers neatly contrast both with each other and the two Cretans: Minos represents brutality until he relents in the *lieto fine*, and Tauride remains in conflict with all four lovers throughout the drama. Each of the major characters in the

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<sup>387</sup> Strohm: ‘*Arianna in Creta*: musical dramaturgy’ in *Dramma per Musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 235.

<sup>388</sup> Op. cit., p. 265. Dean elsewhere described this sinfonia as ‘pointless, since apart from a single exclamation for Minos, no one takes the slightest notice, even with the air full of Cupids’ (Op. cit., p. 259). This is a startling misjudgement: neither score nor libretto is a reliable indication of how all the other characters on stage are expected to react visually.

<sup>389</sup> See below discussion of Handel’s revisions for the 1734b version.

<sup>390</sup> There is no hint of the later episode in Greek mythology in which Teseo unwittingly abandons Arianna on the island of Naxos. In contrast, it is noteworthy that Rolli’s contemporary *Arianna in Nasso* for the Opera of the Nobility contains scant elements of moral sentimental drama. Instead it explores the jealous and fickle aspects of love (only Arianna’s lament towards the end of the opera achieves dignity and sincerity), and focuses on Arianna’s seduction by Bacchus. Rolli’s more cynical episode is a kind of story that seems not to have appealed to Handel’s artistic temperament.

opera has a valuable dramatic function as an element of the philosophy that sincere love conquers irrational violence. Thus we can perceive how *Arianna in Creta* - like other Handel operas from the 1730s such as *Partenope*, *Orlando*, *Alcina*, and *Serse* - touches upon concepts of individual enlightenment and contentment arising out of adversity, and contains a persuasive undertone of sentimentality.<sup>391</sup> Strohm observed that dramaturgical qualities in *Arianna in Creta* are reflected in Handel's musical form: several crucial dramatic moments are carefully planned to make use of minuet style, always resolving previous conflict, which led Strohm to conclude that the 'general formula of the opera might be expressed in terms of a musical enlightenment: minuet overcomes fugue ... a statement about civilization which is actually very characteristic of Handel.'<sup>392</sup>

Handel's source librettos for *Arianna in Creta* were adaptations of work by Pietro Pariati (1665-1733), a friend and colleague of the influential poet Apostolo Zeno. Perhaps Handel had some interaction with Pariati in Venice, where the poet resided throughout Handel's early period in Italy (1706-1710) and was involved with operatic projects at the Teatro San Cassiano. In summer 1714 Pariati was appointed court poet in Vienna, and spent the rest of his life in the Imperial city providing librettos for oratorios, cantatas, pastoral dramas and operas for the Hapsburgs.<sup>393</sup> In 1715 Pariati wrote *Teseo in Creta*, which was first set to music by Francesco Conti and first performed at Vienna on 28 August 1715 to celebrate the birthday of Queen Elisabeth Christine.<sup>394</sup> None of Pariati's 1715 aria texts appear in Handel's opera. Instead, the anonymous London adaptation was based on *Arianna e Teseo*, an adapted version of Pariati's libretto set by Leonardo Leo and performed during the 1729 Carnival at the Teatro della Pace in Rome. Research by

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<sup>391</sup> Almost all of Handel's London operas feature conclusions about people's relationships that tend to be either optimistic or at least moralistic. The only exceptions that present uncompromisingly cynical resolutions are the late operas *Berenice*, *Imeneo* and *Deidamia*.

<sup>392</sup> Strohm remarked that in *Arianna* 'Handel is not a philosopher but a dramatist. He does not stop at 'expressive' symbolisms or abstractions (such as key characteristics) but transforms the dramatic content as much as possible into allegories'. (Op. cit., pp. 235-6).

<sup>393</sup> Giovanna Gronda: 'Pariati' in *NG Opera*.

<sup>394</sup> McCleave: *Dance in Handel's Italian Operas: The Collaboration with Marie Sallé*, p. 161.



Giovanna Gronda<sup>395</sup> established that Handel's opera was also prepared directly from a copy of another adapted version of Pariati's libretto used at Naples in 1721.<sup>396</sup> The table below reveals that eight out of twenty-nine aria and duet texts in Handel's *Arianna in Creta* seem to be substantially new texts exclusive to his setting:

First lines of arias and duets 1733 first version + additions <sup>397</sup>	Naples 1721 <i>Arianna e Teseo</i> Leo and others	Venice 1727 <i>Arianna e Teseo</i> Porpora	Rome 1729 <i>Arianna e Teseo</i> Leo	London 1733/4 <i>Arianna in Creta</i> Handel ['New' texts]
Act I: Tauride 'Mirami, altero in volto'			✓	
Tauride 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' (1734b)				✓
Carilda 'Dille che nel mio seno'	✓		✓	
Arianna 'Deh' lascia un tal desio'			✓	
Teseo 'Nel pagnar col mostro infido'		✓	✓	
Alceste 'Tal' or d'oscuro velo'			✓	
Carilda 'Quel cor che adora'			✓	
Arianna & Teseo 'Bell' idolo amato'		[✓] <sup>398</sup>	[✓]	✓
Teseo 'Sdegnata sei con me' (1734a) <sup>399</sup>		✓	✓	
Arianna 'Sdegno, amore fanno guerra core'				✓
Act II: Teseo 'O patria! ... Sol ristoro'				✓
Alceste 'Non hà difesa'			✓	
Arianna 'Sò, che non è più mio'			✓	
Tauride 'Qual leon, che fere irato'				✓
Carilda 'Narrargli allor saprei'		✓	✓	
Teseo 'Salda quercia'	✓	✓		
Tauride 'Che se fiera poi mi nieghi'	[✓]			✓
Alceste 'Son qual stanco pellegrino'		✓	✓	
Minos 'Se ti condanno'			[✓]	✓
Arianna 'Se nel bosco resta solo'	✓			
Act III: Carilda 'Un tenero pensiero'			✓	
Alceste 'D'instabile Cupido' (1734b)				✓
Alceste 'Par che voglia' <sup>400</sup>				✓
Teseo 'Ove son? ... Qui ti sfido'	✓	✓	✓	
Arianna 'Turbato il mar si vede'			✓	
Tauride 'In mar tempestoso'			✓	
Alceste 'Al fine amore' (1733)				✓
Arianna & Teseo: 'Mira adesso' (1734a)				✓
Teseo & Coro 'Bella sorge la speranza' <sup>401</sup>			✓	

This confirms that Handel's adaptation was based on the Rome 1729 libretto. In Handel's autograph manuscript Alceste's aria 'Par che voglia' was originally titled 'Lusinghiera nel mio seno', which is also a text from the 1729 libretto. The above table also proves that the

<sup>395</sup> *La carriera di un librettista: Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia*, Bologna, 1990. I am also grateful to Stefan Brandt for personal correspondence discussing his research into *Arianna* settings by Leo and Handel.

<sup>396</sup> The 1721 Naples version of *Arianna e Teseo* was a pasticcio organized by Leo, featuring music by Bononcini, Orlandini, Porpora and Vivaldi.

<sup>397</sup> This does not include texts that Handel transferred after 1733.

<sup>398</sup> Square brackets indicate texts loosely based on the source but essentially new in Handel's setting

<sup>399</sup> Although 'Sdegnata sei con me' is taken from the 1729 Rome libretto (II.vii), Handel's version has several variants different from its source and is located in an entirely different position.

<sup>400</sup> Handel's initial text for 'Par che voglia' instead began 'Lusinghiera nel mio seno'. This abandoned text was the 1729 libretto's first line of the aria re-titled 'Bella sorge la speranza' in Handel's setting.

<sup>401</sup> This was originally an aria for Alceste in III.ii, but with its first two lines reversed (in the 1729 Rome source the aria was titled 'Lusinghiera nel mio seno').

libretto of Handel's opera was certainly prepared directly from copies of the Naples 1721 libretto: both Arianna's 'Se nel bosco' and 'Del Ciel voi giusti numi' (an abandoned aria for Alceste in Handel's 1733 autograph)<sup>402</sup> only have precedent in the Neapolitan text. Teseo's 'Salda quercia' was not retained for Rome in 1729, so its probable source was also the Neapolitan text. Although Handel used several aria texts that first appeared at Venice in 1727,<sup>403</sup> all could have been taken for his version of the opera from the 1729 libretto. There is no evidence to suggest that Handel and/or his anonymous literary collaborator consulted a copy of the 1727 Venetian version.

Some new additions ('Che se fierà', 'Se ti condanno', and 'Bell' idolo amato') were modelled to varying extents on ideas taken from the source librettos.<sup>404</sup> Dean judged that 'The libretto as set by Handel is a wretched affair' and that Pariati's recitatives were made into 'mincemeat':<sup>405</sup> Pariati's Vienna 1715 original text contained 1351 lines of verse (excluding its *Licenza*), which were reduced to 1139 for Naples in 1721 (excluding comic scenes), and shortened yet further to 1050 for Leo's setting in 1729. The text set by Handel was cropped down to only 596 lines of verse.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> See Appendix 3d.

<sup>403</sup> 'Nel pagnar', 'Sdegnata sei con me', 'Son qual stanco pellegrino', and variant versions of 'Bell' idolo amato' and 'Narrargli allor saprei'.

<sup>404</sup> Minos' aria 'Se ti condanno' was modelled on a quartet in the 1729 libretto, and the duet 'Bell' idolo amato' was modelled on an aria for Teseo that appears in both 1727 and 1729 librettos (Gronda: *La carriera di un librettista: Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia*, pp. 725-36). Stefan Brandt drew my attention to the relationship between Tauride's 'Che se fierà' (seemingly a new aria text for Handel in 1733) and the aria text 'Scioglierò le tue catene' in the 1721/2 Naples source (personal communication).

<sup>405</sup> Op. cit., p. 259. Dean's criticism of Handel's libretto is almost entirely negative. Apart from noting that Handel's text has some attractive supernatural elements added to it, Dean complained that 'As a result of compression the characterization is confused and the action jerky and inconsequent. Handel gets the opera off of the wrong foot by omitting the entire first scene, which explains the background and without which much of what follows is inexplicable outside the tenuous Argument' (Ibid.). This is harsh, especially as it seems unlikely that Handel's audience was unfamiliar with the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. Dean also complained that 'The score teems with simile pieces; black clouds, an oak, a lion, a lost traveller, a nightingale, a gentle breeze and a storm-tossed steersman are all called to evidence' (p. 260). This is severe: all cited similes are relevant to the dramatic context of each character's feelings. Dean considered that Handel's 'control of the drama is uncharacteristically limp' (p. 264), and opined that 'The device whereby Arianna overhears Tauride detailing the obstacles that confront Teseo in the labyrinth and a few minutes later communicates them to Teseo in writing would appear to require both a sound recorder and a computer.' (pp. 259-60). Dean's criticism is witty, but I doubt that verisimilitude was a conscious priority for Handel or his London audience.

<sup>406</sup> Such drastic abridgement of the source libretto recitatives was not unusual in Handel's London operas. Dean observed that In *Ezio* 'Nearly 1,500 lines of recitative were reduced to just over 600' (Op. cit., p. 197).



## Handel's composition process

We can speculate that Handel became familiar with both of the source texts of Pariati's *Arianna e Teseo* after meeting Leo during the Venice carnival in 1729,<sup>407</sup> although his trip to Italy to recruit singers for the Second Academy certainly had a direct impact upon the composition of *Arianna in Creta* four years later: it was during his 1729 travels that Handel became interested in hiring the castratos Carestini and Scalzi.<sup>408</sup>

Giovanni Carestini was a celebrity, and reputedly the equal of the Opera of the Nobility's leading men Senesino and Farinelli. From the age of 12 he had studied in Milan, and in 1721 gave his Roman debut in Alessandro Scarlatti's *La Griselda* alongside his teacher Bernacchi (later Farinelli's teacher, and briefly a member of Handel's Second Academy company during its first season). Having experienced operatic successes in Vienna, Venice, Prague, Rome, Naples, and Munich, Carestini was perhaps the most illustrious castrato singer to work for Handel during the 1730s, and was certainly the Second Academy's biggest new attraction for the 1733-4 season.<sup>409</sup> Burney claimed that 'It was the opinion of Hasse, as well as of many other eminent professors, that whoever had not heard Carestini was unacquainted with the most perfect style of singing', and described his voice as 'the fullest, finest, and deepest counter-tenor that has perhaps ever been heard'. Burney also remarked:

Carestini's person was tall, beautiful, and majestic. He was a very animated and intelligent actor, and having a considerable portion of enthusiasm in his composition, with a lively and inventive imagination, he rendered every thing he sung interesting by good taste, energy, and judicious embellishments. He manifested great agility in the execution of difficult divisions from the chest in a most articulate and admirable manner.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Strohm: 'Handel and his Italian opera texts', pp. 37-8.

<sup>408</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Handel's trip to Italy in 1729 and its subsequent influence on his operatic activities in London.

<sup>409</sup> Dale E. Monson: 'Carestini' in *NG Opera*.

<sup>410</sup> Op. cit., pp. 782-3.

Handel's other newly arrived castrato, Carlo Scalzi (fl. 1718-1738), was unequivocally a soprano. Scalzi had sung in all of the major operatic centres in Italy, and had worked for leading composers including Porta, Orlandini and Vinci. Dean observed that Scalzi 'was placed in the front rank on the Continent',<sup>411</sup> but the castrato seems to have made a limited impression in London; Handel employed Scalzi only during the 1733-4 season, and the role of Alceste in *Arianna* was the only original role composed for him. Burney ambivalently remarked that Handel gave Scalzi 'but little to do'.

Handel composed *Arianna in Creta* specifically for his provisional new cast in advance of the 1733-4 season. Handel had heard Carestini and Scalzi singing four years earlier while in Italy, and was evidently able to commence composing their roles despite their absence. The composer already knew Durastanti and Strada's voices adequately enough to write impressive arias for them. But, despite varying degrees of familiarity with the voices at his disposal, Handel's composition of *Arianna* became a complicated process. An examination of the autograph manuscript reveals that the opera underwent several layers of change before it was first performed. Many of these changes were made after October 1733 in consequence of Handel's slight miscalculation about the tessitura at which Carestini felt most comfortable.

Other alterations cannot be so conveniently explained, and the relocation of several arias and the insertion of a new duet may be primarily due to Handel revising the opera's structure for aesthetic reasons. Alceste's 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' was not Handel's first intention for II.xii: the autograph score reveals that Handel initially sketched the opening four bars of an aria with the first line 'Del Ciel voi giusti numi' - an aria text from the 1721/2 Naples libretto, which Handel intended to set it as a Larghetto, in 12/8, in E flat major. Handel abandoned 'Del Ciel voi giusti numi' at an embryonic stage, and instead wrote the musically dissimilar slow aria 'Son qual stanco pellegrino'.

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<sup>411</sup> 'Scalzi' in *NG Opera*.



It is surprising that Handel was dissatisfied with 'Del Ciel voi giusti numi': Appendix 3d shows that its melodic easiness and lilting *siciliano* style are musically attractive, and the first four bars suggest that, if completed, the aria could have adequately served its purpose. It is likely that Handel was motivated by musico-dramatic concern. Although the abandoned fragment has tantalising musical potential, Handel's second thoughts proved to be infinitely superior on both musical and dramatic levels. After deleting 'Del Ciel voi giusti numi' Handel commenced 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' on the reverse of the same folio, marked it Andante, and set it in G minor. Its slower tempo and more expressive key allow greater scope for pathos than the attractive but emotionally standardized style suggested by the abandoned fragment. Burney described it as 'a very plaintive and pleasing air ... with a fine solo part for the violoncello, intended to display the abilities of Caporale, just come over.'<sup>412</sup> Handel assigned his new principal cellist a lyrical introduction accompanied only by continuo, manipulating the 6/8 metre by contrasting a simple melodic theme with increasingly eloquent semiquaver passages. The orchestra's full string section joins with an understated yet complementary accompaniment in bar 9, before Alceste's song commences in bar 13 (see *HG*, p.73). From bar 25 Alceste's vocal part increasingly interweaves with the solo cello, and from bar 41 until the end of the A section it seems as if the singer is supporting the cellist rather than the conventional reverse.

Handel made another significant revision during his composition process that seems to have been made for the opera's artistic improvement. In the *scena ultima*, Teseo's 'Bella sorge la speranza' flows into the concluding chorus, but the aria was originally assigned to the character Alceste (III.ii).<sup>413</sup> Handel presumably decided to transfer the music after entertaining second thoughts about either III.ii or the *scena ultima*: on f. 67r he wrote a cue connecting 'Bella sorge la speranza' with the final chorus (located on f. 83r); then, on the folio that now precedes the final chorus (f. 82r), he wrote another cue

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<sup>412</sup> Op. cit., p. 784.

<sup>413</sup> It is still located in this position in Handel's autograph manuscript (See Appendix 3e).

indicating that ‘Bella sorge’ was to be sung there by Teseo followed by the chorus in D major. We can speculate that Handel made this series of decisions because he thought that Alceste’s music and text evoking ‘the rise of beautiful hope’<sup>414</sup> were more appropriate for the finale, and so made a note for his copyist to alter the sequence in the conducting score (rather than rewrite Teseo’s version of the aria out in full in its new position), and then quickly wrote the chorus version of ‘Bella sorge’ at the end of the manuscript.

Unfortunately, the last few pages of the autograph manuscript leave this conjectural hypothesis open to doubt: the paper structure of the autograph suggests that the chorus of ‘Bella sorge la speranza’ was written on a ‘unio’,<sup>415</sup> perhaps to avoid wasting paper, but it is impossible to determine whether this was inserted at the end of the manuscript during or after the composition of the first draft was completed. The *scena ultima* recitative and a cue for Teseo’s version of ‘Bella sorge’ are both located on f. 82r, which is the last folio of the last ‘binio’<sup>416</sup> extant from the original manuscript sequence: it is possible that the alteration was made before Handel composed a first draft finale. There is no extant evidence that Handel previously envisaged a different ending of the opera, although neither can we discount the possibility that there may have been an embryonic or completed alternative version that Handel discarded, perhaps using the finale chorus text ‘Venga il di che fa beato’ evident in the 1729 source libretto.

After Handel relocated ‘Bella sorge la speranza’, he returned to III.ii to compose a new replacement aria for Alceste. This aria initially had the opening line of text ‘Lusinghiera nel seno mio’. However, this was the original first line of ‘Bella sorge la speranza’ in the 1729 source libretto (the original first two lines were reversed in Handel’s setting). Perhaps the re-use of the line was coincidental, but it is possible that Handel made a mistake in writing ‘Lusinghiera nel mio seno’ for Alceste’s new aria while consulting a copy of the source libretto. It is a reasonable hypothesis that the text of Alceste’s new aria

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<sup>414</sup> Translation of the aria’s first line.

<sup>415</sup> i.e. two leaves of paper both taken from one original sheet.

<sup>416</sup> i.e. four leaves from one original sheet.



was amended to 'Par che voglia' in order to avoid needless repetition. Handel inserted 'Par che voglia' in the autograph manuscript prior to the opening sinfonia of Act III. This eventful sequence of insertions and alterations make the appearance of the manuscript initially confusing (see Appendix 3e), but the probable composition process of II.ii and the *scena ultima* can be simply summarized:

**Stage 1**

Handel composed 'Bella sorge la speranza' for Alceste in III.ii

**Stage 2**

Handel decided to reallocate the aria to Teseo in the *scena ultima*, and used the same musical material in the final chorus (it is possible that this decision was made before Handel had already composed another final chorus)

**Stage 3**

Handel replaced Alceste's 'Bella sorge' in III.ii with a new aria that initially featured the first line 'Lusinghiera nel mio seno' (i.e. identical to the second line of 'Bella sorge', and originally its first line in the 1729 source); this had to be re-texted 'Par che voglia'

This three-stage process strongly suggests that the complete 1733 autograph version of *Arianna* is not simply Handel's first draft of the opera, but that in at least some respects it had already undergone several changes not enforced by practical requirements before Handel completed, signed, and dated f. 84r with the annotation 'Fine dell' Opera / London 5 October /1733 / G.F. Handel'.

### **The first performances of *Arianna* and its reception**

Rumours about Handel composing *Arianna in Creta* quickly reached the Opera of the Nobility, whose music director Nicola Porpora had already composed a successful setting of the same libretto.<sup>417</sup> It may even be that Handel's choice of Pariati's libretto was to some extent a pre-emptive strike against Porpora, but the Opera of the Nobility responded aggressively by staging their own version of an *Arianna* story. Porpora decided not to re-use his own previous settings of Pariati for reasons that are obscure to us. Strohm observed

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<sup>417</sup> *Arianna e Teseo*, composed in 1727 for Venice.

that 'Porpora could have contributed a setting of his own ... of the libretto of Handel's *Arianna* without any fear of its being musically unsuitable. Instead, however, he found himself obliged to compose in haste quite a different *Arianna* libretto, possibly in order to give Rolli a more responsible part in the undertaking.'<sup>418</sup>

Paolo Rolli was Secretary to the Opera of the Nobility, and his libretto *Arianna in Nasso* dramatizes Teseo's abandonment of Arianna on Naxos rather than his heroism in defeating the Minotaur at Crete. The distinction between the two was probably of little significance to London audiences during the 1733-4 season. Burrows observed 'That both companies should have run new operas on 'Ariadne' subjects ... can hardly have been a coincidence'.<sup>419</sup> Handel's opera was completed first on 5 October 1733, and Rolli probably commenced preparing his libretto for *Arianna in Nasso* afterwards. However, Porpora made a special effort to get the opera ready quickly: it must have been composed in time to give the singers their arias to learn before the rehearsal at Prince Frederick's home Carlton House on Christmas Eve 1733.<sup>420</sup> Porpora's *Arianna in Nasso* was first performed on 29 December 1733 almost an entire month before Handel's *Arianna in Creta* was produced on 26 January 1734, although it has been implied that the rush gave Porpora little long-term advantage.<sup>421</sup> Furthermore, a pantomime entitled *Bacchus and Ariadne* featuring the ballet dancer Marie Sallé was performed at Covent Garden on 26 February 1734; Dean observes that 'London seems to have been *Ariadne*-mad this season.'<sup>422</sup>

Some members of the King's Theatre audience favorably appreciated Handel's major attraction Carestini. Lady Bristol probably attended Handel's second performance of the pasticcio *Semiramide*, and on the same date wrote to her husband:

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<sup>418</sup> Strohm: 'Handel and his Italian opera texts', pp. 66-8.

<sup>419</sup> *Handel*, p. 178.

<sup>420</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 337-8.

<sup>421</sup> Strohm claimed that 'a comparison of [Porpora's] two scores suggests that the music which he had written in 1727 would have done him more credit.' ('Handel's pasticci', p. 183). However, with twenty-four performances, Porpora's opera was no doubt a commercial success.

<sup>422</sup> On 20 April 1734 all three different Ariadnes were performed the same night (Dean: *Op. cit.*, p. 266).



I am just come home from a dull empty opera, tho' the second time: the first was full to hear the new man, who I can find out to be an extream good singer; the rest are all scrubbs except old Durastante, that sings as well as ever she did.<sup>423</sup>

It is ambiguous whether Lady Bristol meant that *Semiramide* itself was artistically dull - despite Handel attempting to offer the latest fashion by using arias by Vinci - or if there was no interesting conversation to be had with other members of the audience, but her remark is the fullest first-hand description of the company of singers for whom Handel created *Arianna in Creta*. The audience was perhaps astonished by the surprise return of Durastanti; she had been Handel's prima donna in Italy almost three decades earlier, and formerly a mainstay of the 'Royal Academy of Music' during the early 1720s before the ascendancy of Cuzzoni and Faustina.<sup>424</sup> The 1733-4 season proved to be Durastanti's swansong for Handel, but her short-lived return means that she experienced a working relationship singing newly-composed music across a longer number of years than any other singer with whom Handel worked, even the tenor John Beard.<sup>425</sup> Durastanti was cast as the secondary character Tauride, for whom Handel created some magnificent show-stealing moments, such as the arrogant 'Mirami, altero in volto' (I.i) and the splendid showpiece 'Qual leon' (with horns, III.vi).<sup>426</sup> Lady Bristol's comment that Durastanti sang 'as well as ever she did' needs to be taken reasonably seriously, but with awareness that Handel probably took precautions to avoid presenting his ageing ex-prima donna in an unflattering vocal light.

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<sup>423</sup> Deutsch, p. 336.

<sup>424</sup> For a detailed discussion of Handel's working relationship with Durastanti during the early 1720s see Larue: 'Durastanti as Leading Man and Woman' in *Handel and his Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720-1728*, pp. 80-104

<sup>425</sup> Durastanti probably first sang for Handel in 1706/7, and last worked for him during the 1733-4 season (i.e. across a period spanning c. 28 years). Handel composed for John Beard across a slightly lower number of years, from November 1734 (the revival of *Il Pastor Fido*) to the title role in *Jephtha* in 1752. Beard also sang for Handel in the later 1750s (e.g. *The Triumph of Time and Truth* in 1757). Beard's relationship with Handel was sustained throughout both decades without long breaks, and he participated in a greater variety of repertoire and performed a higher number of Handelian roles than Durastanti.

<sup>426</sup> Dean's scathing remark that Tauride 'is a cardboard villain, and floppy cardboard at that' (Op. cit., p. 264) is an overstatement.

Presumably Lady Bristol's 'scrubbs' were Scalzi, Negri, and Waltz. Burney has little good to say in their praise, although his comment that Waltz was 'a German, with a coarse figure, and a still coarser voice'<sup>427</sup> is not reliable: William C. Smith established that by October 1733 Gustavus Waltz was already an established regular singer in London theatres, and his later career indicates that he was probably a versatile and knowledgeable musician.<sup>428</sup> Later music Handel composed for him, including the title role in *Saul*, indicates that Waltz was a capable singer. Burney disparagingly remarked that the alto Maria Caterina Negri 'seems to have possessed no uncommon abilities',<sup>429</sup> and it is fair to observe that the roles Handel created for her were variable in quality. Yet Negri must have been a reasonably reliable performer for Handel to entrust her with assertive roles such as the villain Polinesso in *Ariodante* and the heroine Bradamante in *Alcina*. The part of Carilda in *Arianna in Creta* was the first that Handel created for her, and, although it is an insipid role if perceived in isolation, it is unreasonable to expect that Handel always matched his own high standards when writing for new singers for the first time.

Newman Flower described the context of *Arianna in Creta*'s first performances in a statement that contains less fact than fiction:

Handel was going under; the empty theatre was the visible sign of it. His wretched singers could scarcely maintain the beauties of the songs he had given them. Not that *Ariadne* was Handel at his best. His worries, the increasing cohorts of the enemies against him, the falling away of friends who, in fat years and lean, had followed his fortunes and patronised his work, his treasury thin and starved for want of new capital just when his enemies had money in plenty to burn, coloured his composing.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Op. cit., p. 785.

<sup>428</sup> For a discussion of the life and career of Waltz, see Smith, William C.: 'Gustavus Waltz: Was He Handel's Cook?' in *Concerning Handel*.

<sup>429</sup> Op. cit., p. 784.

<sup>430</sup> Newman Flower: *George Frideric Handel: His Personality and His Times*, p. 214.



A superficial glance at Handel's music proves beyond doubt that Carestini and Strada were not wretched singers. Flower's insinuation that Handel's theatre was empty is exploded by the fact that *Arianna in Creta* was a box office success: it had an impressive run of sixteen performances between 26 January and 20 April 1734, and its prompt revival near the beginning of the following season does not imply failure.

These factors did not dissuade Dent from claiming that *Arianna in Creta* 'is a lamentable falling-off after *Orlando* ... otherwise the best one can say of the opera is that it is generally good average Handel, of the conventional type.' Dent also condemned the libretto as 'extremely obscure'.<sup>431</sup> Meynell similarly assessed that 'After the phenomenal originality and musical richness of *Orlando*, *Arianna* is plain fare ... Several of the arias are little more than pretexts for bravura display.'<sup>432</sup> More recently, Dean perpetuates the tradition of negative criticism associated with *Arianna in Creta*,<sup>433</sup> but in the last decade the opera has been successfully revived on several occasions.<sup>434</sup> It also ought to be pointed out that Dent, Meynell, Flower and Dean – none of them writers without subjective prejudices – convey judgments borne from a restricted linear perspective that views only Handel's new operas in chronological order, without much discussion of seasonal context. An alternative perception of *Arianna in Creta* is to understand it as one essential ingredient of an entire season, like one part of a jigsaw. If seen in this light, we can appreciate Handel's achievement more realistically than from persistent yet misleading comparisons with Handel's previous or subsequent new operas.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> 'The Operas' in *Handel: A Symposium*, p. 50.

<sup>432</sup> *The Art of Handel's Operas*, p. 180.

<sup>433</sup> Dean considers that the score contains 'very little first-rate Handel', and sharply criticises that the plot repels 'sympathy and even credibility', complaining that 'the prominence of simile form texts and others that are merely sententious ... act as a brake on the fluidity of drama.' However, Dean's commentary on *Arianna in Creta* is balanced by favourable remarks such as 'There are of course a few superb episodes, ... and even the weaker arias may yield flashes of inspiration'. (Op. cit., pp. 260).

<sup>434</sup> The complete 1734a version was staged at the Göttingen Händel Festspiele in 1999. An abridged concert version was performed in the Goethe-Theater at Bad Lauchstadt during the 2002 Halle Händel Festspiele. A commercial recording conducted by George Petrou (2005) brought the opera increased attention and popularity (see Bibliography).

<sup>435</sup> For a detailed discussion of the 1733-4 season see Chapter 1.

Eighteenth-century reports wholly contradict suggestions by Dent, Meynell, and Flower that *Arianna* was poorly esteemed by its contemporary audiences or weakly executed. An entry in 'Colman's Opera Register', dated January 1734, states 'Ariadne in Crete a new Opera & very good & perform'd very often - Sigr Carestino sung surprisingly well: a new Eunuch - many times perform'd'.<sup>436</sup> Dean observes that 'The Royal Family were assiduous in their attendance, appearing in different strength on at least seven nights.'<sup>437</sup> Another comment in praise of an aspect of *Arianna* was written by the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, in a letter dated 12 May 1737: 'I was at the rehearsal of the charming *Berenice* this morning, when I received an inexpressible delight. The overture is excellent [,] a good fuge [sic] and after it a pleasing air in the taste of that at the end of the overture in *Ariadne*, with a sprightly air after it, which concludes this overture'.<sup>438</sup> It is pertinent that Shaftesbury used the *Arianna* overture as a point of reference for another Handel work that particularly delighted him. The minuet from the *Arianna* overture was a popular concert item during the eighteenth century, and remained so long after Handel's Italian operas lost popularity in London. It is a vindication of Shaftesbury's opinion that the minuet from *Berenice* also became popular and outlived the opera for which Handel created it.<sup>439</sup>

In the later eighteenth century the popularity of *Arianna* among connoisseurs and collectors had not entirely diminished: 'Ariadne' was on the shortlist of printed editions of Handel's music sent by Gottfried van Swieten to James Harris jr on 25 March 1777.<sup>440</sup> In the 1780s, Burney wrote that in *Arianna* Handel 'seems to have exerted his powers of invention, and abilities in varying the accompaniments throughout this opera with more vigour than in any former drama since the dissolution of the Royal Academy of Music in

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<sup>436</sup> Deutsch, p. 343. Colman, once erroneously believed to have been the author of the *Arianna in Crete* libretto, could not have written this entry: he died at Pisa in 1733.

<sup>437</sup> Op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>438</sup> Burrows & Dunhill: *Music and Theatre in Handel's World*, p. 29.

<sup>439</sup> On 21 February 1740, John Kent requested that James Harris include the overture from *Ariadne* in the next concert to be given by the Salisbury Musical Society (Ibid., p. 91).

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., pp. 924-7.



1728.<sup>441</sup> Such laudatory eighteenth-century reception is unlike the predominantly negative judgments of *Arianna in Creta* in modern Handel literature, a trend that has so far lacked objective detailed supporting arguments.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>441</sup> Op. cit., pp. 783-5. Dean criticizes that Burney 'on the whole overrates the opera' (Op. cit., p. 263), ironically whilst underrating it himself. Dean also draws attention to Sir John Hawkins' critical remark that 'Most of the songs in the opera of Ariadne are calculated to please the many', but that this 'attempt failed' (Hawkins: *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, London, 1776, p. 913). Dean's recent discussion of the opera is an immensely useful introduction and guide, but, as cited above, it is not an objective evaluation of Handel's score.

<sup>442</sup> The late John Merrill offered an open-minded verdict in his assessment that the opera 'may not be one of Handel's greatest, but it has many charms.' (*Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, unpublished typescript, Princeton University Library).

## Part Two: Description of The Three Versions of *Arianna in Creta*

### Sources

Handel's autograph manuscript (R.M.20.a.6) is principally the October 1733 'first' draft version, but it includes revisions, relocations, transpositions, and insertions made before the first performance on 26 January 1734.<sup>443</sup> The conducting score (M A/1005) was written by Smith, and contains annotations, instructions, and corrections in Handel's handwriting. Its content corresponds to the 1734a version, but also has elements - such as pasted slips - relevant to the 1734b revival. The so-called 'Cembalo' score (M A/1005a) is a full score that was written by Smith and the copyist S1, and has annotations in Handel's handwriting.<sup>444</sup> It generally corresponds to content evident in the conducting score, but some sections of manuscript inserted for the 1734b revival were written in short score (i.e. only voice and continuo parts), and, in the case of the dances, only as figured continuo lines. Secondary manuscript copies contain the 1734a version, but are useful for supplying tempo markings that are unspecified in the autograph and performing scores. Some existing copies of the 1734a printed libretto bear the date 1733.<sup>445</sup> Perhaps some copies were printed during late 1733 when it might have been anticipated that the first performance would take place sooner than 26 January 1734, or the publication date of 1733 might have been an indication of 'old style' dating.<sup>446</sup> The sole known extant copy of the 1734b second edition of the libretto is in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Rés. V. S. 391).

### The first draft of *Arianna in Creta* (1733)

Appendix 3a is a reconstruction of each distinct version of *Arianna in Creta* prepared by Handel. It is possible to reconstruct the 1733 first draft version of the opera from Handel's autograph manuscript (RM.20.a.6). The overture, which Dean calls 'one of Handel's

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<sup>443</sup> For information about the paper-conjunction and content of Handel's autograph score see Appendix 3e.

<sup>444</sup> Revisions evident in M A/1005 and M A/1005a were listed by Clausen (Op. cit., pp. 111-3).

<sup>445</sup> See Ellen T. Harris, *The Librettos of Handel's Operas*, Vol. 7 p. xvii.

<sup>446</sup> Dean notes that 'A second impression, identical except for changing the date to 1734, was presumably issued for later performances in the run.' (Op. cit., p. 269).



finest',<sup>447</sup> commences with a slow introduction in the French style, proceeds to a conventional animated Allegro, and concludes with an Andante featuring horns. Most of Act I in the 1733 draft was entirely retained in January 1734 (i.e. 1734a), but in the first draft Teseo's first aria 'Nel pugnar col mostro infido' was originally set in A major (I.v). 'Bell' idolo amato' (I.xi) is the only duet in the 1733 draft, and is immediately followed by Arianna's soliloquy aria 'Sdegno, amore fanno guerra core'.

In the first two scenes of Act II, Teseo experiences a dream in which he is visited by a personification of the Sun. It is surprising that Handel, normally stimulated by vivid scenic material, first confined Teseo's reaction to such an amazing event within simple recitative (II.iii); the next aria in the 1733 version is sung by Alceste (III.iv). Another curiosity is that Handel originally intended Teseo's heroic aria 'Salda quercia' to be sung in II.x, a remarkably different context from its eventual position in 1734a.<sup>448</sup> The final scenes of Act II in Handel's draft version are identical to the order published in *HG*. Although Reinhold Kubik suggests that Handel originally planned to end Act II after Alceste's 'Son qual stanco pellegrino',<sup>449</sup> this hypothesis is wrong: Handel seldom ended a crucially dramatic middle act with an aria for a secondary character,<sup>450</sup> and the lack of a proper connection between the conclusion of Act II and the opening of Act III would have caused an irreparable hole in the plot. Furthermore, the paper-conjunction of the autograph manuscript discredits the possibility that the scenes subsequent to Alceste's aria were inserted after October 1733; the pages immediately after 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' were clearly part of the original 1733 draft.<sup>451</sup> The last two scenes of Handel's first-draft Act II highlight the conflict between King Minos - including his only aria 'Se ti condanno' - and

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<sup>447</sup> Op. cit., p. 264.

<sup>448</sup> The contrasting contexts of 'Salda quercia' are discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>449</sup> 'Die Fassungen von *Arianna in Creta* HWV 32: Überlegungen zum Werkbegriff der Opera seria' in *Gattungskonventionen der Händel-Oper* (ed. Hans Joachim Marx), Laaber-Verlag, 1992.

<sup>450</sup> Sesto concluding Act II of *Giulio Cesare* is a rare example.

<sup>451</sup> This has been recognized by Kubik in his own later research, evident in the unpublished document *Georg Friedrich Händel Arianna in Creta HWV 32: Editionsplan für Band II/29 der HHA*. Copy provided by kind permission of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe Redaktion.

his daughter Arianna, who concludes the Act with her soliloquy response ‘Se nel bosco resta solo’.

There are several notable features of Handel’s 1733 draft of Act III. As previously discussed, Alceste’s ‘Bella sorge la speranza’ (III.ii) was transferred to Teseo in the *scena ultima*, and replaced by ‘Par che voglia’. The text of Alceste’s unperformed version of ‘Bella sorge la speranza’, adapted from the 1729 source libretto but never published, is printed in Appendix 3c. Teseo’s finest scene in Act III is his confrontation with the Minotaur in the Labyrinth (III.iii), which uses a text that was created for the 1721/2 Naples pasticcio *Arianna e Teseo* and retained by Porpora (1727) and Leo (1729). Although this text remains a fixed feature of all three of Handel’s versions, the 1733 draft of the accompanied recitative ‘Ove son?’ is set in the extraordinary key of G sharp minor, and the ensuing aria ‘Quì ti sfido, o mostro infame’ is in E major.

The plot of the opera is concluded in the recitative that opens III.vii, but Handel’s 1733 draft contains an additional two scenes that were never performed. III.viii contains only simple recitative for Carilda and Alceste, and in the next scene the latter has an aria ‘Al fine amore’. Alceste’s aria text, considerably different from Teseo’s in 1734a, is printed in Appendix 3c. The *scena ultima* features Teseo’s setting of ‘Bella sorge la speranza’, and, as already indicated, it is uncertain whether Handel previously composed or sketched an alternative conclusion to the opera. Appendix 3e indicates that Alceste’s ‘Al fine amore’ is certainly an insertion, and ‘Bella sorge la speranza’ is located in its former position for Alceste. Both of the last scenes in the 1733 version are inserted, so they might have replaced folios containing an earlier version of the opera’s conclusion, or at least some fragmentary sketches that would have led towards it. Revisions made after sketching the entire opera, but before Handel indicated that his autograph manuscript was completed, are probably:



- III.ii Alceste's 'Bella sorge la speranza' relocated to *scena ultima* and transferred to Teseo, with its text slightly revised
- III.ii the former position of 'Bella sorge' filled by Alceste's new aria 'Par che voglia'
- III.ix Alceste's 'Al fine amore' inserted

### **The first performance version of *Arianna in Creta*, 1734a**

Handel ensured that *Arianna in Creta* was finished and ready for production long in advance of the opera's first performance on 26 January 1734, but by the time his new opera was performed numerous alterations had been made to the score. Almost all revisions made for 1734a directly involved the role of Teseo:

- I.v Teseo's 'Nel pagnar' transposed down a tone from A major to G major
- I.iii Carilda's 'Dille che nel mio seno' possibly shortened slightly in its A section
- I.xi Duet 'Bell' idolo amato' for Teseo and Arianna relocated to II.xiv, and its former position filled by Teseo's new aria 'Sdegnata sei con me'
- II.iii new recitative, and Teseo's 'Salda quercia' (relocated from II.x)
- II.vi Tauride's 'Qual leon' shortened to its A section only
- II.x 'Salda quercia' (relocated to II.iii) replaced by new recitative and 'Al fine amore' (rescued from omitted III.ix, transferred to Teseo, new text, transposed down a tone from A minor to G minor)
- III.iii Teseo's 'Minotaur' scene transposed down a semitone from G sharp minor and E major to G minor and E flat major
- III.vii new duet 'Mira adesso' inserted for Arianna and Teseo
- III.viii-ix cut
- Scena ultima* 'Bella sorge la speranza' (Teseo, then chorus) transposed down a semitone from E flat major to D major (NB this could have been done already in October 1733)

When Handel composed the role of Teseo, he had only heard Carestini singing in Italy four years earlier. He worked on his 1733 draft of *Arianna in Creta* at least partly from his

memory of hearing Carestini's voice, but perhaps Handel might have used information provided in correspondence from either an agent in Italy or Carestini himself.<sup>452</sup> In the event, Handel's memory, or the information he was provided with, was unreliable. Four of Carestini's arias needed to be transposed down slightly. There are possible alternative explanations for Handel's apparent mistake. Maybe Carestini's voice itself had changed a little since 1729: Carestini initially performed in a soprano register in the 1720s, but by the time he came to London in the autumn of 1733 his voice had settled down to an alto or mezzo-soprano.<sup>453</sup> Or, if Handel received advance information about Carestini's voice from a correspondent in Italy, perhaps the source of such information failed to take into account that musical pitch could have been lower in Italian operatic cities than in London during the early eighteenth-century. It is notable that Handel did not miscalculate by a margin greater than a whole tone, and that interval is within the scope of differing contemporary performing pitches.<sup>454</sup>

We cannot dismiss the possibility that Handel made a simple mistake, but there is no evidence that Carestini was physically unable to sing the un-transposed arias to a satisfactory standard: his vocal range and earlier reputation as a soprano castrato imply that he could have sung the arias in the keys that Handel composed them, and it may be an oversimplification to suggest Handel transposed 'Nel pagnar' because it was too high in pitch for Carestini.<sup>455</sup> The pitch of highest or lowest notes is not the same musical factor as comfortable *tessitura*, and perhaps Carestini's voice did not settle in the extensive *coloratura* Handel had assigned to him without requiring some adjustments. It is likely that

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<sup>452</sup> No relevant correspondence between Handel and a singer or agent has survived, but such correspondence could have occurred at least sporadically.

<sup>453</sup> Monson: Op. cit.

<sup>454</sup> However, the evidence is inconclusive. Bruce Haynes suggested that a variety of pitch standards were in use across Europe during the eighteenth-century, but noted that 'It would surely have been more practical for singers moving back and forth between Venice and London if the pitch between the two places was the same, or within a quarter-step of the same.' (*A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of 'A'*, p. 161).

<sup>455</sup> 'Nel pagnar' features very few notably high passages for Carestini, even in A major. It is possible that its transposition down to G was not made for Carestini's benefit but instead to make it more comfortable for the oboes playing in the ritornello. I am indebted to Anthony Robson (principal oboist, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) for personal communication in which he suggests that baroque oboes play more comfortably in G than in A.



Carestini's voice was better displayed and less exhausted by the transpositions, and probable that moving several taxing long arias down to a lower key would avoid tiring out a *primo uomo* with a lot of difficult music to sing in one evening. I suspect that Carestini's stamina and comfort in extended melismatic writing was a greater influence on Handel's alterations for 1734b than the simple upward extent of vocal range in these arias.<sup>456</sup> It seems likely to me that Handel's decisions to transpose Teseo's arias for Carestini were not simply influenced by pitch or range, but by characteristics of the castrato's voice that remain elusive to us today, such as intonation, the comfortable management of *coloratura*, and technique.<sup>457</sup>

The issue of *tessitura* must have been a factor in the downward transposition of Teseo's 'Nel pugnar' and 'Ove son ... Qui ti sfido', but not all of the transpositions were made because Handel had originally written his arias too high for Carestini. The transposition of 'Al fine amore' was caused by its transfer from Scalzi to Carestini rather than any sort of error on Handel's part, and the lowering of 'Bella sorge la speranza' to D major was probably influenced by its new position as the linking aria to the opera's final chorus: E flat major seems to have been awkward for horn players in London during this period, whereas D major is perfect for those instruments.

Carestini's presence in London during Handel's re-drafting of *Arianna in Creta* also seems to have influenced the considerable expansion of the role of Teseo. The transfer of 'Al fine amore' from Alceste (III.ix, cut in 1734a) to Teseo (II.x) was perhaps an instance of making use of music that might otherwise have been wasted by its omission,

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<sup>456</sup> The highest note in the transposed 'Bella sorge la speranza' is a top A, which is semitone higher than the highest written notes in the remainder of Carestini's 1734a part.

<sup>457</sup> It is difficult for us to ascertain the 'comfort zone' in the voice of an eighteenth-century singer even if we examine the notation that composers created for them. A method of measuring a singer's most comfortable and preferred *tessitura* from notated sources of medieval music was conceived by Richard Rastall ('Vocal Range and Tessitura in Music from York Play 45' in *Music Analysis* 3 (1984), pp. 181-199), and developed further by Julian Rushton for analysis of baritone roles in late eighteenth-century Viennese opera. Rushton attempted to calculate the centre of a singer's voice, which he calls the 'Point of the Centre of Gravity' (i.e. 'PCG'), and described this as an 'average obtained by computing the amount of time the singer actually dwells on each note ... [and] covers statistically erratic extensions of range by including them in a complete calculation averaging pitch and duration. This gives an imprecise, but still truer, picture of the lie of a voice, its *tessitura*, than does the observation of extremes of range.' ('Buffo roles in Mozart's Vienna' in *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, p. 417). No such analysis of Handel's compositions for singers has yet been undertaken; this is an opportunity for valuable future research.

but Handel also composed new music for 1734a. ‘Sdegnata sei con me’ (I.xi) represents an entirely different style from the rest of Teseo’s music; the opening vocal statement is evidence of Carestini’s strengths at singing sentimental music that is otherwise indiscernible in *Arianna in Creta*. It is notably significant that ‘Sdegnata sei con me’ was the only aria Handel composed for the role of Teseo after Carestini had arrived in England: the aria is an early indication of how Handel responded to Carestini’s voice and personality.<sup>458</sup>

‘Sdegnata sei con me’ replaced the duet ‘Bell’ idolo amato’ for Arianna and Teseo, which was relocated to II.xiv, where it was inserted between Minos’ ‘Se ti condanno’ and Arianna’s ‘Se nel bosco resta solo’. Other material was also repositioned in 1734a: Teseo’s ‘Salda quercia’ was incorporated it into a scene that had originally lacked an aria (II.iii), and its former position (II.x) was filled by ‘Al fine amore’ (relocated from III.ix, transferred from Alceste to Teseo, and transposed down a tone). III.viii-ix were omitted, and Handel reshaped the conclusion to the opera with the insertion of the new duet ‘Mira adesso’ for Teseo and Arianna (III.vii), which led directly to the *scena ultima*. The composition of ‘Mira adesso’ could have been motivated by a desire to give the audience a duet between two famous singers rather than from purely aesthetic and dramaturgical concerns, but it successfully performs its *lieto fine* function.<sup>459</sup>

Apart from changes revolving around Carestini, Handel made very few alterations between the completed draft of *Arianna in Creta* (October 1733) and the opera’s first performance on 26 January 1734. Carilda’s ‘Dille che nel mio seno’ was probably adjusted: M A/1005 has several passages in its A section pasted over, thus making it more concise while retaining a full *da capo* structure; M A/1005a contains an alternative shortened version of one single statement of the entire unabridged A section. Of the three

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<sup>458</sup> It is notable that Handel proceeded to explore these talents more fruitfully in operas produced during the following season (1734-5). The roles of Ruggiero and Ariodante feature several similarly sentimental arias, notably ‘Mi lusinga’ (*Alcina*), ‘Verdi prati’ (*Alcina*), and ‘Scherza infida’ (*Ariodante*).

<sup>459</sup> Dean condemns ‘Mira adesso’ as ‘vacuous and very long, with an endless efflorescence of triplets’ (Op. cit., p. 263). I believe this criticism is too harsh, and consider that the element of vocal display in a jaunty happy ending ought not be underestimated.



authentic alternative versions of 'Dille che nel mio seno', it is possible that one of the shorter variants could have been prepared for the 1734a performances. It seems incredible to a modern observer that Tauride's flamboyantly scored and spectacular 'Qual leon' (II.vi) was never performed in its entirety under Handel's direction, but the markings in M A/1005 clearly indicate that the lengthy da capo aria was shortened to its A section. Perhaps Handel thought the aria was too long, but it appears that he was sensitive to protect Durastanti's waning vocal powers from public exposure.

### **The Revived *Arianna*, 1734b**

Handel's final performances of *Arianna in Creta* between 27 November and 11 December 1734 occurred after his company moved from the King's Theatre to John Rich's recently built theatre at Covent Garden. The 1734b printed libretto text is substantially unchanged from 1734a (see Appendix 3b), but this obscures considerable musical alterations made for a slightly different cast performing under different circumstances:

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| I.i          | Sinfonia and two lines of recitative responding to its events cut  |
| I.ii         | Tauride's 'Mirami' replaced by new aria 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti'                                     |
| I.iii        | Carilda's 'Dille che nel mio seno' probably shortened to its A section only                              |
| I.vi         | Vocal part in Alceste's 'Tal' or d'oscuro velo' probably transposed down an octave                       |
| I.ix         | Carilda's recitative removed and 'Quel cor che adora' transposed up a tone from E minor to F sharp minor |
| End of Act I | Ballet inserted (exact distribution of dances not known)   |
| II.iii       | Teseo's 'Salda quercia' perhaps compressed at the end of its A section <sup>460</sup>                    |
| II.iv        | Alceste's 'Non hà difesa' probably with voice part sung an octave lower                                  |
| II.vi        | recitative only; Tauride's 'Qual leon' cut   |

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<sup>460</sup> In M A/1005 'Salda quercia' contains markings by Handel compressing the A section, removing an entire folio of coloratura. This was probably done for Caffarelli in Handel's self-pasticcio *Alessandro Severo* (1738), but we cannot rule out the possibility that the abridgement was made four years earlier for performances of *Arianna in Creta*.

II.viii	Carilda's 'Narragli allor saprei' transposed up a minor 3 <sup>rd</sup> from E major to G major
II.x	entire scene cut (Teseo's recit and 'Al fine amore')
II.xii	entire scene cut (24 lines of recit for Carilda and Alceste, and Alceste's 'Son qual stanco pellegrino')
End of Act II:	Ballet probably inserted (music lost)
III.i	Carilda's 'Un tenero pensiero' replaced by Alceste's new aria 'D'instabile Cupido'
III.ii	entire scene cut (Alceste's recit and 'Par che voglia')
<i>Scena ultima</i>	Teseo's 'Bella sorge la speranza' reduced to A section
End	Ballet inserted after final chorus (exact distribution of dances not known)

Arianna's arias were untouched during the revision process for 1734b. The role of Teseo, sung again by Carestini, was only slightly compressed by the removal of the solo scene containing 'Al fine amore'. Other characters required greater reworking. Scalzi and Durastanti had both left Handel's company and returned to the continent, so the castrato role of Alceste was adapted for the tenor John Beard, and Maria Caterina Negri (contralto) switched to the mezzo-soprano role of Tauride; her original role Carilda was taken by her soprano sister Maria Rosa Negri. The re-assignment of each of these three secondary roles required Handel to prepare transpositions, rearrangements or insertions.

Handel inserted two new arias in 1734b.<sup>461</sup> Tauride's first aria 'Mirami' was replaced by the new aria 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' (I.ii), and Carilda's 'Un tenero pensiero' was replaced by Alceste's 'D'instabile Cupido' (III.i); this tenor aria is a parody of 'D'instabile fortuna', composed for Fabri in Handel's 1729 opera *Lotario*, and which had also been used in the 1731 revival of *Rinaldo*. Handel transposed the aria up a semitone from E to F major, which implies that Beard had a slightly higher *tessitura* than Fabri. With half of Alceste's 1734a arias removed in 1734b, the insertion of 'D'instabile Cupido' provided Beard with an opportunity to display his ability. Scenes containing Alceste's 'Son qual stanco' and 'Par che voglia' were entirely eliminated from 1734b, but

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<sup>461</sup> Both were printed in the libretto, but neither was translated into English (see Appendix 3c).



the tenor version of this role features two arias that the castrato Scalzi sang in 1734a: Handel did not indicate adaptations to the vocal part in any of the sources, so I presume that Beard sang the vocal part down an octave without evident complications.

The role of Tauride was diminished by the omission of 'Qual leon' (II.vi), but his arias 'Che se fiera poi mi nieghi' (II.xi) and 'In mar tempestoso' (III.v) were retained without revisions. The music for Carilda was more drastically adapted for Maria Rosa Negri: 'Quel cor che adora' (I.ix) was transposed up a tone from E minor to F sharp minor, and 'Narragli allor saprei' (II.viii) was transposed up minor third from E major to G major. Although Carilda's first aria 'Dille che nel mio seno' (I.iii) was not printed in the 1734b wordbook, it was probably performed in a shortened version (either one full statement of its complete A section or an abridged da capo version).<sup>462</sup>

In order to include a prominent role for the dance company led by Marie Sallé, Handel inserted dance sequences at the end of each Act. We cannot be certain about how he constructed these ballets. All of the pertinent secondary manuscript copies include only five dances, and do not indicate their position within the opera's structure. These five dances are:

1. Gavotte (4/4, A major, Act I?)
2. Lentement (3/4, D major, Act I?)
3. Gavotta (4/4, A major, Act III)
4. Musette (4/4, A major, Act III)
5. Andante Allegro (6/8, D major, Act III)

The 'Lentement' was a condensed version of the overture's minuet, its scoring reduced without horns; the short 'Musette' was a newly-composed dance recycled a few months

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<sup>462</sup> In the 'Cembalo' score (M A/1005a) the B section of Carilda's 'Dille che nel mio seno' is cut, but not the entire aria. Reinhold Kubik also suggests that the aria was not cut in 1734b, so it seems plausible that in 1734b only its A section was performed. The *da capo* version with a truncated A section in M A/1005 may also relate to the 1734b revival. It is possible that Handel could have intended either abridged version for 1734a.

later for the overture of *Alcina*;<sup>463</sup> the Andante Allegro is a 20-bar excerpt from the beginning of the opera's final chorus 'Bella sorge la speranza'. An enigmatic cue at the end of Act I in M A/1005a corresponds to an A-major gigue composed as interval music in the April 1720 version of *Radamisto* (HWV 12a). This was presumably a sixth dance for *Arianna in Creta*, and Kubik proposed that these six dances were divided into two ballet suites, each containing conventional three-movement sequences.<sup>464</sup> It is plausible that the first two dances listed above preceded the *Radamisto* gigue, thus forming the three-movement ballet sequence at the end of Act I.

We do not know what dance music Handel used at the end of Act II. There are no traces of dances in any musical sources. Sarah McCleave remarked that 'Neither the conducting nor the harpsichord score includes any dances at the end of Act II; there is no evidence that material was removed or added from these scores at this point', but added that 'the insertion and subsequent removal of dances on discrete folios would be difficult to detect.'<sup>465</sup> It is unclear whether or not Handel actually inserted a ballet at the end of Act II, but its indication in the printed libretto invites the suggestion that he at least contemplated it. If so, it is likely that Handel used recently composed dance movements from *Il Pastor Fido* / *Terpsicore*.<sup>466</sup> It is comparatively straightforward to reconstruct Handel's ballet at the end of the opera: Handel wrote 'Act 3' next to an autograph sketch of the Gavotta (Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 263, f. 25r),<sup>467</sup> and it is inconceivable that the thematic material of the Andante Allegro in D major would have appeared anywhere other than at the end of the opera after 'Bella sorge la speranza'. Handel's choice of music for the final dance probably led him to shorten Teseo's aria in order to avoid excessive repetition.

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<sup>463</sup> Dean: Op. cit., pp. 266-7.

<sup>464</sup> Kubik: 'Die Fassungen von *Arianna in Creta*' (Op. cit.).

<sup>465</sup> *Dance in Handel's Italian Operas: The Collaboration with Marie Sallé*, pp. 170-1.

<sup>466</sup> McCleave proposed that the chaconne in A major, sarabande in E minor, or the 3/8 ballo in C major from *Terpsicore* would fit here 'both tonally and dramaturgically' (Ibid., p. 171).

<sup>467</sup> Handel's dance music from this source was distributed between *Il Pastor Fido*, *Arianna*, *Oreste*, and *Ariodante* (McCleave: 'Handel's unpublished dance music' in *GHB VI*, p. 134).



McCleave described problems that make it impossible to ascertain the exact musical content or position of Handel's dance music.<sup>468</sup> The sole evidence for the use of the *Radamisto* Gigue in *Arianna in Creta* is in M A/1005a, and this manuscript does not contain cues for other dance movements that are included in M A/1005 and in secondary copies. Therefore, the two performing manuscripts do not correlate satisfactorily in their modern condition, and cannot reveal a reliable and definitive sequence of ballet movements. For example, the cue for a Gigue at the end of Act I in only one source does not guarantee it was always performed there during the 1734b revival. Indeed, M A/1005 suggests that at least some ballet music was omitted from some performances, perhaps when Handel decided to use them in the forthcoming self-pasticcio *Oreste*.

Most of Handel's operatic revivals led him to compress a considerable amount of recitative, but in *Arianna in Creta* the 1733 recitatives had already been heavily compressed from the 1729 source libretto, and the 1734b revival did not require a shortened narrative. Apart from three omitted scenes, Handel made only small alterations to the remaining recitative texts. Carilda lost two lines of recitative prior to her aria 'Quel cor che adora' (I.ix). It is less clear whether Handel adapted Arianna's recitative text in II.ix: it was fully retained in the 1734b printed libretto, but on M A/1005a f. 76r Arianna's concluding statement 'vedrai sù questo foglio impresso il modo d'atterrar l'orrendo mostro. Vanne pur, traditore! vinci, mà vincer mai potrai il mio core' is crossed out. It is unlikely that Arianna's statement was cut because it is the dramatically crucial moment when she gives Teseo information that will help him navigate the labyrinth, thereby enabling him to defeat the Minotaur. This famous element of the original Greek legend is essential to the plot, and a significant moment portraying Arianna's character in dramaturgical terms: she is furious with Teseo, and mistakenly believes him to have been false to her, but, in spite of her anger, her love for him is underlined by her helpful act. It is dramatically inconceivable that a brief text of such importance to both narrative and character portrayal was not

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-5.

included in performance. The physical condition of M A/1005a f. 76r looks as if it has been pasted over with something else, such as a revised setting of the recitative that would harmonically facilitate the removal of Teseo's subsequent scene, thus allowing the drama to progress smoothly to Tauride's confrontation with Carilda.

The 1734b printed libretto contains a small amendment: the stage direction 'A horrid subterraneous Way in one Part of the Labyrinth for the Victims appointed to the Monster' (III.ii) was removed. If the removal of the stage direction did reflect staging the performance without a labyrinth, it could conceivably provide the only satisfying explanation concerning why Arianna's recitative referring to it in II.ix might have been altered. But I do not believe this explains why the direction was removed from the 1734b libretto. It is possible that the stage direction was a fanciful description in the first edition libretto, intended primarily as a stimulus for the reader's imagination rather than an account of what the audience literally saw on the stage at the King's Theatre, but its absence from the 1734b libretto increases its significance as a serious stage direction in 1734a. Practical staging issues at Covent Garden might have enforced its removal from the revised libretto. Rich's theatre was newer and allegedly better equipped than Heidegger's King's Theatre, but that does not guarantee that the opera's staging relocated smoothly to a new theatre with different scenery. Perhaps it was not possible to stage the labyrinth at Covent Garden in 1734b in the exact same way it had been presented in 1734a.

Another small alteration might have been made because of staging at Covent Garden. The eight-bar sinfonia in the opera's opening scene, during which 'The Stone, on which is engraven the Agreement of *Athens* falls down and breaks to Pieces', and subsequently 'Four *Cupids* fly thro' the Air'<sup>469</sup> was omitted in 1734b. The removal of such a dramatic supernatural event also necessitated the excision of short recitative reactions by Teseo and Minos (see Appendix 3b). Both recitatives and the stage direction regarding the sinfonia are printed in the 1734b libretto, but the relevant passages are crossed out in

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<sup>469</sup> Description taken from the 1733 printed libretto.



M A/1005, and in M A/1005a the sinfonia was pasted over with a blank slip. But it is unlikely that Rich's new and well-equipped theatre lacked appropriate scenery or machinery for the sinfonia to be presented as originally intended. It is implausible that Handel made this cut on account of practical difficulties in staging. Furthermore, it is strange that Handel removed such an important element of his opening scene. I believe that the attractive and important allegory presented in the omitted Sinfonia might have been reserved instead for Marie Sallé and her dancers to use as a staging for one of the several ballets inserted for them in 1734b. It is certain that Sallé's ballets for Handel's *Ariodante*, *Alcina*, and *Terpsicore* (the prologue to *Il Pastor Fido*) had narrative qualities reflecting the action of the opera:<sup>470</sup> the scenario of the omitted sinfonia, including the symbolic breaking of a tablet and the ascendancy of four cupids, lends itself perfectly to interpretation as a visually entertaining and dramatically pertinent dance.

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<sup>470</sup> For a detailed discussion of dramaturgy in Handel's Covent Garden ballets, see McCleave: 'Handel's unpublished dance music' (Op. cit.).

## Chapter 4 *Esther* (HWV 50b)

### Part One: The Creation of Handel's *Esther*

#### The birth of English oratorio

Unlike the operas discussed in the previous chapters, there are discussions of the historical context and gestation of Handel's first English oratorios in long-established scholarly literature. Winton Dean and Howard Serwer both provide information about Handel's alterations to *Esther* between 1718 and 1757,<sup>471</sup> but it was outside the scope of their published work to explore the actual impact that Handel's revisions have upon the musical and dramatic shape of his oratorio. Thus there is plenty of discussion within this chapter that sheds new light on *Esther*, benefiting from new research and a re-examination of the oratorio in its numerous guises under Handel's own direction between circa 1718 and 1757.<sup>472</sup>

Early manuscript copies usually feature the simple title 'The Oratorium', perhaps used because it was reputedly the only work of its kind yet written in England. It seems that *Esther* was composed for James Brydges, the Earl of Carnarvon (later the first Duke of Chandos). As with its near contemporary work *Acis and Galatea*, composed for Brydges in 1718, we do not possess information about the first performance of Handel's first English oratorio.<sup>473</sup> Until recently Handel biographers mistook the date of both works, perhaps due to repeating some errors in the chronology of Handel's works included in Mainwaring's

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<sup>471</sup> Dean's *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, Serwer's *HHA* edition of *Esther*, and 'The Italians in *Esther*' in *Georg Friedrich Händel - Ein Lebensinhalt: Gedenkschrift für Bernd Baselt (1934-1993)*.

<sup>472</sup> Appendix 4a charts the sources of Handel's music for the Cannons version, outlines how it was expanded with self-borrowings in 1732, and presents the known revisions Handel made to *Esther* up to 1757.

<sup>473</sup> The date remains unknown, but it might have taken place at Brydges' palatial residence Cannons (near Edgware, North London. The house no longer stands). Graydon Beeks has expressed his belief to me that it is unlikely the large resources required for *Esther* were available at Cannons before 1719/20 (personal communication; also see Beeks: 'Handel and Music for the Earl of Carnarvon' in *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti: Tercentenary Essays*, and his booklet essay for the commercial CD recording by Harry Christophers and The Sixteen).



*Life of Handel* published in 1760.<sup>474</sup> The error was further disseminated by Chrysander's misleading edition of the score, published under the inauthentic title *Haman and Mordecai*. The suggestion that these two major works were composed for Cannons in the early 1720s cannot be sustained because by that time Handel was busy with the recently founded Royal Academy of Music in London. Unfortunately, sections of Handel's original autograph of the Cannons *Esther* are lost, including the last page on which he may have indicated the date of completion. The Malmesbury manuscript of *Esther*, made for Handel's enthusiastic supporter Elizabeth Legh, was certainly prepared by March 1719 [new style], and bears the following inscription 'The Oratorium / Composed by George Frederick Handel Esquire / in London / 1718'.<sup>475</sup>

Until *Esther*, the genre of dramatic oratorio was a predominantly Italian phenomenon. Handel had composed two oratorios in Rome a decade earlier,<sup>476</sup> but he also wrote a German oratorio in London during the mid-1710s (the so-called 'Brookes Passion'). It is possible Handel might have wanted to reawaken his skill at a genre that was fashionable in Italy yet unfamiliar in England. Howard Serwer observed that a 'survey of the music composed by Handel from 1710 to 1718 shows that during this period he had exhibited his talents for his English patrons in all genres but oratorio.'<sup>477</sup> Perhaps Brydges, or someone in his circle, suggested to Handel that he complete his range of musical activities by composing an oratorio in English.<sup>478</sup>

*Esther* had minimal artistic influence on Handel's immediate career until approximately fourteen years later, but it must have attracted some supporters before he revived it: Bernard Gates produced the Cannons version at The Crown & Anchor tavern to celebrate Handel's 47th birthday in February 1732. Viscount Percival, later the first Earl of

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<sup>474</sup> Mainwaring believed *Acis and Galatea* was composed in 1721, and did not suggest a date for *Esther*. Chrysander believed *Esther* was produced in 1720.

<sup>475</sup> Serwer: *HHA Esther (Fassung I)*, Critical Report, p. 186. However, there is ambiguity about the date because the last digit is not clearly legible.

<sup>476</sup> *Il Trionfo del Tempo e nel Disinganno* and *La Resurrezione*.

<sup>477</sup> Op. cit., Foreword, p. XIV.

<sup>478</sup> Serwer noted an oratorio 'in the Italian manner with its strongly Catholic ambience would well have been inappropriate in an England constantly troubled by the threat of the Catholic monarchists' (Ibid.).

Egmont, attended one of Gates' several performances, and consequently wrote in his diary that 'This oratoria or religious opera is exceeding fine, and the company were highly pleased.'<sup>479</sup>

Contemporary reception of Handel's own revised version, performed a few months later, appears to have been mixed. Members of Handel's audience might have been enthusiastic about *Esther* as a composition, but some were unsure about the ability of Italian opera singers to perform in English. An admirer of Handel's Italian operas produced an anonymous pamphlet titled *See and Seem Blind*,<sup>480</sup> and expressed the opinion '(I am sorry that I am so wicked) but I like one good Opera better than Twenty Oratorio's', and insisted that Handel's contemporary Italian operas *Ezio* and *Sosarme* were 'Masterly' and 'most pleasing'.<sup>481</sup> Regarding Handel's performance of *Esther*, the author gave the following satirical description:

I saw indeed the finest Assembly of People I ever beheld in my Life, but, to my great Surprise, found this Sacred Drama a mere Consort, no Scenary, Dress, or Action, so necessary to a Drama; but Handel, was plac'd in a Pulpit ... Strada gave as a Halleluiah of Half an Hour long; Senesino and Bertolli made rare work with the English Tongue you would have sworn it had been Welch; I would have wish'd it Italian, that they might have sung with more ease to themselves, since, but for the Name of English, it might as well have been Hebrew.<sup>482</sup>

The difficulties some Italian singers experienced in *Esther* must have invited some ridicule, and explains why two of Handel's subsequent revivals during the mid-1730s were

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<sup>479</sup> Deutsch, p. 286. Gates' performances also included the coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest*, which probably gave Handel the idea to use it in his own revival of the oratorio.

<sup>480</sup> Robert D. Hume has convincingly proposed that the author was the playwright Aaron Hill (Hume's preface to a facsimile edition of *See and Seem Blind: Or, A Critical Dissertation on the Publick Diversions, etc.*).

<sup>481</sup> It is difficult to be confident whether the pamphlet reflects Hill's own personal opinions, or is intended to be a caricature of those opinions he heard. He was a supporter of Handel but also a relentless campaigner for English opera. Rather than the pamphlet being perceived as an attack on Handel, Serwer suggested that it contains at least three distinct different voices: a serious critic, the lower class man in the street, and a genteel lady ('The Italians in *Esther*', p. 82).

<sup>482</sup> Deutsch, pp. 300-1.



bilingual.<sup>483</sup> Handel resorted to bilingual performances less often after the mid-1730s, but the problem of Italians struggling to sing English persisted throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>484</sup>

The most fascinating reaction to Handel's initial dabbling with English works in 1732 is a letter addressed to the composer by Aaron Hill, which seems to have been instigated by the author's experience of *Esther*:

Having this occasion to trouble you with a letter, I cannot forbear to tell you the earnestness of my wishes, that, as you have made such considerable steps towards it, already, you would ... be resolute to deliver us from our Italian bondage; and demonstrate, that English is soft enough for Opera, when compos'd by poets, who know to distinguish the sweetness of our tongue ... I am of the opinion, that male and female voices may be found in this kingdom, capable of every thing, that is requisite; and, I am sure, a species of dramatic Opera might be invented, that, by reconciling reason and dignity, with musick and fine machinery, would charm the ear, and hold fast the heart, together.<sup>485</sup>

Hill had provided Handel with the scenario for *Rinaldo* in 1711, and was a passionate advocate for opera in English. The poet seems to have optimistically regarded *Esther* as the birth of fully-fledged English opera. If so, Hill was mistaken: Handel did not respond by producing secular operas in English, although Hill's principles were fulfilled in theatre works such as *Alexander's Feast*, *Saul*, *L'Allegro*, and *Semele*: diverse examples of Handel's compositions in English that arguably 'reconcile reason and dignity ... charm the ear, and hold fast the heart, together'.

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<sup>483</sup> Strada was the only Italian singer who seems to have regularly sung in English during the 1730s.

<sup>484</sup> An anecdote about the castrato Giuseppe Millico, who sang in London during the early 1770s, relates that the Italian struggled with the aria 'How can I stay when love invites? I come my Queen to chaste delights', singing the second line as 'I comb my Queen to chase de lice'. (Balderston, Katharine C., ed., *Thraliana; the diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*, vol. 1 p. 533).

<sup>485</sup> Dated 5 Dec 1732 (*Deutsch*, p. 299).

### Aspects of the libretto of Handel's *Esther*

In the eighteenth century it was rumoured that Alexander Pope wrote the libretto of 'The Oratorium'.<sup>486</sup> Pope never confirmed or denied the attribution; it is plausible that the text could have been produced from collaboration between several members of the Cannons circle, which also included John Gay and Dr. John Arbuthnot.<sup>487</sup> The libretto was based on Thomas Brereton's 1715 play *Esther; or Faith Triumphant*, which was a close adaptation of Racine's *Esther* (1689).<sup>488</sup> The biblical story of Esther is only partially portrayed in Handel's oratorio, and a brief summary of the original scriptural context fills several gaps in the libretto: King Assuerus of Persia has entered the third year of his reign, and holds a lavish feast to celebrate. During this the King orders that his wife Vashti be brought before him, so that he can introduce her to his Royal guests. Vashti refuses to obey the King, and her disobedience angers the King. Vashti is divorced, and Assuerus begins to search for a new wife. Mordecai, a Jew, takes Esther to the King's house, so that she may be considered as a candidate. They keep their ethnicity and religion secret from the Persians. Esther pleases the King, and after twelve months she becomes Queen, but continues to keep her faith and origin secret. Mordecai saves the King from an assassination plot.

The remainder of the biblical story is related in Handel's oratorio.<sup>489</sup> King Assuerus appoints the arrogant bully Haman as his right hand man. Haman wishes to force everybody to 'reverence' him, but Mordecai refuses. In revenge, Haman tricks the King into arranging a decree that all enemies of the State must die. Haman uses this as an opportunity to persecute the Jews, but Mordecai encourages Esther to intercede with the King on their behalf. However, it is forbidden to enter the King's inner court without

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<sup>486</sup> The attribution is contained in Viscount Percival's diary (*Deutsch* p. 286), and was publicly suggested by a newspaper advertisement on 19 April 1732 for an unauthorized performance (*HHA* score, foreword, p. XVI). Pope never denied the attribution, but most scholars have doubted its accuracy. The most thorough discussion of the attribution to Pope in Handel literature is Ruth Smith's *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, pp. 277-9.

<sup>487</sup> Dean: *Op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>488</sup> The affinity between Brereton and Racine, and in turn Handel's oratorio libretto, is discussed by Dean (*Ibid.*, pp. 204-5).

<sup>489</sup> The 'Additions' to the Book of Esther in the *Apocrypha* does not contain much that influences the oratorio plot, although it is the only scriptural source in which Esther faints and Assuerus consoles her.



having first obtained his personal invitation. All who break this law are condemned to death, unless the King recognizes the person, and holds out his golden sceptre towards them as an indication that they may approach him. With a genuine fear of execution, not least caused by the fate of the previous Queen, Esther bravely visits the King unbidden. She is spared by his love for her, and Esther requests that the King and Haman join her at a banquet. Meanwhile, the Bible reveals that Haman exults in being invited to a banquet with the King and Queen, and celebrates by having tall gallows built especially for Mordecai. At the banquet, Esther exposes Haman's treachery against Mordecai and her people, and Haman - despite showing some remorse in Handel's version - is hung upon his own gallows.

The Cannons version of *Esther* is a slender work containing six short scenes. In order to perform it as a full-scale entertainment at the King's Theatre, Handel required the poet Samuel Humphreys to redesign the libretto. Humphreys' ability has been doubted,<sup>490</sup> but although his poetry is occasionally parsimonious and lacks the psychological drama evident in other works that seem to have invigorated Handel's imagination to greater achievements, his transformation of the libretto's structure from six short scenes into a full entertainment across three Acts created several significant additions. We cannot discern how much the revised libretto owed to Samuel Humphreys' own imagination, and it is likely that his contributions were more or less in strict accordance with Handel's specific instructions. Indeed, the prominent amount of recycled music suggests that Handel had already selected music ripe for adaptation, and that therefore only Humphrey's recitatives and small elements of the verses were strictly original and created independently from the metrical patterns in the arias, duets, and choruses that already existed.

The most controversial feature of Humphreys' additions is the adapted text for the coronation anthem *Zadok the Priest*, with its *Esther* revision containing a plea to show mercy to 'Jacob's Race'. Perhaps some members of Handel's audience would have

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<sup>490</sup> Dean assessed that 'of all Handel's librettists, [Humphreys] alone was a literary hack and no more' (Op. cit., p. 225).

interpreted this as an overt Jacobite reference, even if the composer himself might have been innocent of any controversial political intent.<sup>491</sup> Some scholars believe that the text 'God is our hope' was probably not performed.<sup>492</sup> The original 1732 pages of the conducting score (M C/261) that would have contained this anthem are lost, and most secondary manuscripts of *Esther* contain the Cannons version of the work. The text 'God is our hope' does not appear in any music manuscripts of Handel's oratorio. But 'God is our hope' is included in all the early printed librettos I have examined, which suggests that the text could have been performed. This possibility is confirmed by the apparent existence of performance material that contained 'God is our hope' which was used for a performance of *Esther* at Oxford in 1749 to commemorate the opening of the Radcliffe Camera. An observer reported that:

In the Afternoon at four began the first Oratorio, which was Esther. The Management of the Musick was committed to Mr Hayes the University Professor, who had got together from London & other Places about forty Voices and fifty Instruments. This first Oratorio was performed to a Company of about 15000, & the only part anchored was the fine Coronation Anthem, God save the King. It was observed by some that this whole Line was remarkable *Mercy to Jacob's Race, God save the King.*<sup>493</sup>

I have discovered another letter containing a first-hand account of this event in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, in which E.C. Bentham describes the ceremonies at the opening of the 'Ratclivian Library', and briefly outlines several concerts of Handel's music arranged as part of the celebrations. Although Bentham does not specifically quote the

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<sup>491</sup> Smith: Op. cit., pp. 282-3.

<sup>492</sup> A performance of the 1732 version of *Esther* at the London Handel Festival in April 2002, prepared with assistance from Anthony Hicks, elected to use the 1740 text 'Blessed are they' instead.

<sup>493</sup> Letter from Benjamin Kennicott to Thomas Bray, undated, presumably April or May 1749. Both were fellows of Exeter College. Letter reprinted in *The Bodleian Quarterly Record*, Vol. I (Nos. 1-12) 1914-1916, Oxford, 1917, p. 169. I am grateful to Ruth Smith for alerting me to this source of information, which has never appeared in Handel literature before.



controversial reference to Jacob's race, he was also sufficiently motivated to remark that Handel's anthem 'God save the King' was performed at the 'theater'.<sup>494</sup> It is not surprising that academics at Oxford, a city notorious for its Jacobite sympathies, found the resolution that God will show mercy to 'Jacob's race' remarkable. If Hayes had acquired musicians from London, we can speculate that he also obtained performance material from a source that led directly to Handel in some way. In order for 'God is our hope' to be performed in Oxford in 1749, there must have been an authentic precedent in Handel's own manuscripts that is now lost. I believe that these letters are convincing support for the claim that Handel used the text 'God is our hope' in his performances of *Esther* between 1732 and 1737, whilst he remained either unaware or complacent about the possible political interpretation of a reference to 'Jacob's Race'.

Handel's inclusion of the anthems *Zadok the Priest* and *My heart is inditing* can be interpreted as a transparent and conscious demonstration of allegiance to the Hanoverian monarchy. Both anthems were composed only five years before for the coronation of King George II and Queen Caroline, and it does not seem fanciful to speculate that *My heart is inditing*, written to accompany the coronation of Queen Caroline, was deliberately connected to Queen Esther at the beginning of the oratorio in order to create a flattering comparison between Queens. In a discussion of the intellectual and political contexts of the *Esther* libretto, Ruth Smith suggested:

It is easy to read the Cannons libretto of *Esther* as produced by a circle sympathetic to Jacobitism and containing an unexceptionable plea for tolerance of minority views and the repeal of anti-Catholic legislation. There is no reason to suppose that such a subtext would have been inimical to Handel who ... seems always to have measured commissions principally according to their scope for his compositional power.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Letter written by E.C. Bentham, dated 'Oxford Apr. 14 1749' (Gerald Coke Handel Collection, 2136).

<sup>495</sup> Smith discusses alternative intellectual readings of the *Esther* libretto (Op. cit., pp. 280-4).

Humphreys' revision of the libretto attempted to alter the allegorical nature of *Esther* to support a pro-Hanoverian reading, whilst subverting the text of one of its most blatant Hanoverian musical references with a potent Jacobite allegory. Smith observed that 'Humphreys is an excellent instance of an eighteenth-century author whose writings transmit apparently contradictory political signals.'<sup>496</sup> From 1740 onwards Handel used the text 'Blessed are they that fear the Lord' instead, and one can only surmise that this later alteration was made to avoid potential political embarrassment. We should not assume that Handel was unaware of political statements in the texts that various authors supplied throughout his long career, but I suspect that he initially regarded any potential libretto as a dramatic narrative ripe for entertaining musical expression. Jacobite or Hanoverian elements in the libretto were essentially subordinate to his concern with theatrical and musical potential.

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid., p. 190.



## Part Two: Description of The Ten Versions of *Esther*

### Sources

Handel's autograph score (R.M.20.e.7) is principally the Cannons version, but some additions composed for the 1732 version are bound at the end, forming a makeshift appendix.<sup>497</sup> The conducting score (M C/261) was written by Smith, and also contains annotations, instructions, and corrections in Handel's handwriting.<sup>498</sup> Some helpful traces of revisions made for revivals between 1733 and 1737 survive, but many pages of the original 1732 score have been removed, and much of the manuscript now contains new copies or fresh insertions made in 1740, 1751, and 1757.<sup>499</sup> Most of the removed 1730s pages are lost, but some have survived in Cfm MU MS 251. Secondary copies of the Italian additions created for *Esther* during the mid-1730s are included in the Shaftesbury MS Lfon 666 and the 'Aylesford' miscellaneous music collection RM.18.c.5.

The printed librettos of *Esther* have a complicated history. There are four editions of the *Esther* libretto dating from the early 1730s. Surviving copies of the second edition had not been identified when Dean produced his study of the oratorio's sources in 1959, but it turns out that copies in the Newman Flower Collection (B.R. 310.I Hd578) and Trinity College, Cambridge (H.8.48), have identical layout, typeface, decorations, and content to the first edition. Moreover, a unique copy of the third edition in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection (Lfon 1840) includes an identical version, although it is dated 1733. This was 'probably a speculative affair prepared in advance' and 'does not reflect what was performed'.<sup>500</sup> The fourth edition (British Library 11630.c.3), also dated 1733, features a few cuts and re-allocated texts that probably indicate the 1733a London version.

A special edition of the libretto was printed by Thomas Wood in London for Handel's performances of *Esther* in Oxford in July 1733: copies in the Gerald Coke

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<sup>497</sup> See Burrows and Ronish: Op. cit., pp. 118-20.

<sup>498</sup> Another conducting score, M C/261a, is relevant only to performances under Smith jr's direction dating from after Handel's death. Its content is outside the scope of the dissertation.

<sup>499</sup> Many revisions indicated in the conducting score are briefly listed by Clausen (Op. cit., pp. 139-43).

<sup>500</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 210.

Collection (Lfon 1839) and the Bibliothèque Nationale (Rés. V. S. 821) both feature a title page which claims that the text was 'As it is performed at the theatre in Oxford.' No librettos dated 1735 or 1737 survive. It seems certain that old word-books printed in 1732-3 were re-used, with an inserted leaf describing alterations to the text and Italian additions. No such copy has yet been identified, but it has been recently established that this method was certainly used for Handel's contemporary revivals of *Deborah* (1734) and *Athalia* (1735).<sup>501</sup> A new edition might have been printed for Handel's single performance of *Esther* during the short 1740 season at Lincoln's Inn Fields, but it is also possible that a new word-book was deemed an unnecessary expense.

Existing copies of the Dublin 1742 libretto in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection (Lfon 1847) and the British Library (MK.8.d.4) are identical, and feature some variants of the text,<sup>502</sup> and Assuerus' name is written as 'Ahasuerus' for the first time. It attributes authorship of the libretto to John Arbuthnot (no mention is made of Samuel Humphreys or Alexander Pope), and it features mistakes that raises doubts about its reliability as a definitive guide to Handel's performance.<sup>503</sup> A new edition was printed for Handel's next London revival in 1751, but Dean incorrectly thought that there were two different issues of the 1757 libretto:<sup>504</sup> copies in the Newman Flower Collection (B.R. 310.I Hd51), the Royal College of Music (XX.G.21) and the University of Texas (ML53.2A8H3) feature 'May thy beauty' and the B section of 'This glorious deed' on pasted slips over the original printed text 'Virtue, truth and innocence'. These slips were later removed from copies in the British Library (162.m.15) and the Hall Collection (Princeton University XB83.0201), but at one time all extant copies were identical.

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<sup>501</sup> See my discussion of *Deborah* in Chapter 5 Part 2 and Burrows: 'Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*'.

<sup>502</sup> For example, in *Esther*'s 'Flatt'ring tongue' the third line is correctly printed as 'Bloody wretch, no more I fear thee' ('Part III Scene VI', 1742), whereas all London editions modified this to 'Barb'rous wretch', perhaps in order to avoid offending the ladies with coarse language (see Appendix 4b).

<sup>503</sup> Haman is misspelled as 'Hamon' and the scene heading for 'Scene V' is omitted.

<sup>504</sup> Op. cit., p. 222.



## **The 1732 London Version**

Appendix 4a is a tabular reconstruction of all Handel's performing versions of *Esther* for which sufficient evidence has been discovered. Appendix 4b presents the content of all known printed librettos that correspond to Handel's own performances. If we compare the original Cannons version with the text of Handel's first public performance in May 1732, there are nine examples of Samuel Humphreys' expansion of the original libretto:

1. I.i is a new extensive opening scene for the Israelite Woman introduces Esther ('Breathe soft ye gales ... Watchful angels'). Esther sings an 'Alleluia'. Mordecai's 'So much beauty' is followed by the coronation anthem *My heart is inditing*.
2. In I.ii, Haman's treachery is expanded by an extra scene in which he persuades Assuerus that the Jews are a threat to the kingdom.
3. Act II commences with the new chorus text 'Tyrants may a while presume'.
4. II.iii features a duet for Mordecai and the Israelite Woman in which their concern over Esther's fate leads them to prayer ('Blessings descend on downy wings').
5. Act II ends with a new scene that includes an aria for the Israelite Woman that praises Esther's success with the King ('Heaven has lent her every charm'), and concludes with the chorus 'God is our hope, and he will cause the king to shew mercy to Jacob's race'.
6. III.i features an abridged text for the chorus 'He comes!'
7. III.ii has a new aria 'Thro' the nation' inserted for Assuerus, which is concluded by the chorus 'All applauding crowds'.
8. Also in III.ii, Humphreys provides a new duet text in which Esther and the Israelite Woman rejoice ('I'll proclaim the wond'rous story').
9. The concluding chorus text 'The Lord our enemy has slain' is compressed, and solo 'Alleluia' sections are added.

Appendix 4a shows that much of the new music was adapted from previous works, ranging from Italian oratorio composed for Rome (*La Resurrezione*, 1708), a Latin motet composed in London ('Silete venti'), the Birthday Ode for Queen Anne composed in 1713,

and two anthems composed for the coronation of George II in 1727. Handel composed four entirely new pieces in 1732: Moredecai's 'So much beauty', Assuerus' 'Endless fame', the Israelite Woman's 'Heaven has lent her every charm', and the duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story'.

A few elements of the Cannons version were never performed again under Handel's direction. Two short recitatives were sacrificed,<sup>505</sup> and the tenor aria 'Sing songs of praise' (2nd Israelite) at the end of Scene II was removed. The chorus 'Shall we of servitude complain' was replaced by a recitative, although the chorus was reinstated in 1751. Sections for solo voices and continuo linked by Purcellian orchestral sections featuring solo trumpet had made the original Cannons version of 'The Lord our enemy is slain' resemble an extravagant verse-anthem, but these were ruthlessly excised in 1732: Handel used only its choral refrains to construct a conventional chorus, although the orchestration is enriched by the addition of two more trumpets, timpani, and bassoons. Handel added solo 'Alleluia' sections that contain technically demanding *coloratura*. In the 1732 printed libretto, this final scene is headed 'Israelites with Mordecai in Triumph', which implies that the 'Alleluia' could be intended for Mordecai. However, my examination of Handel's relevant music manuscripts has revealed that the solos are almost always assigned to the singer who performs Assuerus.<sup>506</sup>

Much of the Cannons score was retained. Handel seems to have regarded the aria 'Jehovah crown'd' as a fixed feature, with its brilliant horn writing. This led through to the rousing chorus 'He comes', although the middle section ('earth trembles') was removed. The Cannons choruses 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' and 'Ye sons of Israel mourn' were retained in their entirety. The chorus 'Virtue, truth, and innocence' was relocated to the beginning of Act II, and given the new text 'Tyrants may a while presume', without

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<sup>505</sup> The 1st Israelite's 'Now persecution shall lay by her iron rod' (beginning of Scene II, Cannons) is replaced with 'Jerusalem no more shall mourn' (same character, I.iv, 1732), and the Israelite woman's 'O god, who from the suckling's mouth' (near the end of Scene II, Cannons) is omitted.

<sup>506</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 101.



significant change to the music. The Israelite Woman's 'Praise the Lord',<sup>507</sup> the accompanied recitative 'Methinks I hear the mother's groans' and aria 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide' (transferred to Mordecai), two of Esther's arias ('Tears assist me' and 'Flatt'ring tongue, no more I'll hear thee'), and Haman's arias ('Pluck, root, and branch', 'Turn not, o Queen, thy face away', and 'How are thou fallen from thy height') were all retained without alteration. Only five arias required musical adaptation. The vocal part in 'Tune your harps' was raised an octave for soprano Mrs Robinson, and the final ritornello was replaced with an extended coda featuring a prominent solo oboe.<sup>508</sup> Mordecai's 'Dread not, righteous Queen, the danger' was transposed up a tone to F major to facilitate the change from tenor to alto. The casting of Senesino as Assuerus in 1732 required that his vocal part be rewritten in 'Who calls my parting soul from death'. The aria 'O beauteous Queen, uncloseth those eyes' was transposed up a fifth,<sup>509</sup> and 'How can I stay when love invites' was transposed up a fourth. Whether in original or revised form, Handel preserved these elements of the Cannons score intact in most subsequent versions.

### ***Esther* at London and Oxford, 1733a and 1733b**

Handel produced two performances at the King's Theatre in April 1733 with a cast that was almost identical to that for 1732, apart Mrs Robinson being replaced by Mrs Wright or Mrs Davis as the Israelite Woman. The soprano Celeste Gismondi, who had recently created the role of Dorinda in *Orlando*, might have been available to perform in *Esther* in April 1733, but there is no evidence to suggest that she did. Appendix 4a illustrates that libretto text and musical arrangements used in 1733a were also substantially identical, with only a few minor alterations.

'Breathe soft ye gales' (I.i) was reassigned to Esther. Perhaps this was done at Strada's instigation, as when Handel transferred Morgana's aria 'Tornami a vagheggiar' to

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<sup>507</sup> 'Praise the Lord' was reduced to its A section only.

<sup>508</sup> This is included in editions of the 1732 *Esther* by Chrysander and Hicks. Neither specifies their source.

<sup>509</sup> Although from 1732 onwards, 'O beauteous Queen' was reduced to its A section only.

Strada's Alcina for the 1736 revival of *Alcina*. The decision to transfer Morgana's climactic aria at the end of Act I to her sister Alcina makes no dramatic sense whatsoever, and was perhaps enforced to some extent by Morgana being performed by Maria Rosa Negri, who was a less capable singer than Strada or the role's original performer Cecilia Young.<sup>510</sup> However, it is easy to imagine that Strada could have envied Morgana's virtuoso aria, thus influencing Handel's revision. If so, then perhaps a similar situation arose in 1733 concerning 'Breathe soft ye gales', when there were other sopranos available. The Israelite Woman's 'Tune your harps' (I.iv) and 'Heaven has lent her every charm' (II.iv) were all reassigned to Esther. It is probable that Strada sang all three numbers acquired in 1733a in all subsequent performances of *Esther* up to 1737.

In I.iii, the Officer's recitative 'Our souls with ardour glow' and chorus 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' were omitted. In previous versions of the oratorio, the chorus 'Ye sons of Israel mourn' was performed twice (iii Cannons; I.v 1732), but in 1733a its first statement was cancelled. In all subsequent revivals the chorus was performed only once at the end of Act I. Mordecai's 'Dread not, righteous Queen, the danger' was transferred to an Israelite soprano, perhaps to reduce Bertolli's discomfort at singing in English. The 1733a printed libretto indicates that the duet 'Blessings descend on downy wings' (II.ii) was performed by 'two Israelites', but these were most likely the soprano Israelite Woman and Bertolli's Mordecai, as in 1732.<sup>511</sup> Esther's soliloquy 'Tears assist me' and the chorus 'Save us, o Lord!' were cut, maybe as a consequence of Strada's acquisition of 'Breathe soft ye gales', 'Tune your harps', 'Heaven! O lend me every charm'.

After the end of the season, Handel revived this version for two performances at Oxford.<sup>512</sup> The 1733b printed libretto in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection indicates that

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<sup>510</sup> According to Dean, Maria Rosa Negri was a mezzo-soprano in range, and 'Handel appears to have thought little of her' ('Negri, Maria Rosa' in *NG Opera*).

<sup>511</sup> Serwer trusts the printed wordbook ('The Italians in *Esther*', pp. 85-6), but there is insufficient evidence of a second contralto soloist in 1733a. Serwer suggests that Mrs. Davis might have sung most of Bertolli's role. This is possible, but, in the absence of proof, I assume that Bertolli was the only singer that could have sung the alto part in 'Blessings descend'.

<sup>512</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Handel's concert series at Oxford in July 1733.



there were no modifications or cuts to either the music or libretto of the 1733a version. This is surprising: almost all of Handel's opera singers that participated in the 1733a London performances had defected to the 'Opera of the Nobility'. In July 1733, most of the cast for *Esther* at Oxford was entirely different, and such a drastic change usually demanded substantial revision. Also, the 1733b 'Oxford' version of *Deborah* was substantially abridged.<sup>513</sup> Handel was fortunate that the soloists available to him at Oxford could perform the most recent version of *Esther* without modification. Despite the omission of 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' from the 1733b libretto, M C/261 reveals that the Officer's recitative and chorus were reinstated at Oxford.<sup>514</sup>

### **The Problem with the Italians - hypothetical suggestions for 1735 and 1737**

In the pamphlet *See and Seem Blind*, a criticism of Senesino and Bertolli struggling to sing in English contains the remark 'I would have wish'd it Italian, that they might have sung with more ease to themselves.'<sup>515</sup> Handel soon came to share this point of view, and between 1735 and 1737 he used two alternating models of *Esther*: a bilingual version (1735 and 1737) and an English version (1736). Dean made some inaccurate and misleading suggestions about the Italian insertions in *Esther*, although perhaps his confusion was derived from an assumption that Carestini sang everything in English (1735), and a misguided belief that the trilingual Francesina (1740) sang some of Esther's numbers in Italian.<sup>516</sup>

Howard Serwer, during research for his *HHA* editions of *Esther*, did not provide any conclusive theories about where Italian music was used, or which characters were portrayed in Italian. Serwer summarised his findings in the article 'The Italians in *Esther*',<sup>517</sup> which is principally a discussion of Handel's use of Italian singers in 1732, and

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<sup>513</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>514</sup> See Appendix 4a, footnote 73.

<sup>515</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 300-1.

<sup>516</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 211-2.

<sup>517</sup> Howard Serwer: 'The Italians in *Esther*' in *Georg Friedrich Händel - Ein Lebensinhalt: Gedenkschrift für Bernd Baselt (1934-1993)*, edited by Klaus Hortschansky & Konstanze Musketa, Halle, 1995.

contains an overview of Handel's 1730s revivals. It offers only a limited amount of information about the 1735 performances, with Serwer stating that 'we have no way of telling exactly what was sung', but that because the cast was 'vocally similar to that used in Oxford in 1733, we might guess that the content of the productions differed little from Oxford and that old wordbooks could have been used.'<sup>518</sup>

Like Dean, Serwer did not explore the likelihood that Carestini could have sung newly-added music in Italian in his role as Assuerus. Serwer's conjecture about re-use of old wordbooks is plausible, yet recent discoveries confirm that this practice was perfectly conducive to bilingual arrangements. Donald Burrows recently discovered an inserted leaf containing seven Italian insertions for Carestini in a libretto of *Athalia* dating from April 1735.<sup>519</sup> The inserted leaf includes 'Bianco giglio', 'Quella fama', 'Cor fedele', 'Angelico splendor', and a different text set to the music of 'Tua bellezza' - all arias associated with *Esther* in secondary manuscripts that Winton Dean and subsequent authors wrongly assumed were created for Conti in 1737.<sup>520</sup>

My discovery of a similar inserted leaf in a previously unknown libretto of *Deborah* (discussed in Chapter 5 Part 2) confirms that it was normal practice to republish old wordbooks with supplementary pages, and that Italian additions prepared for Carestini were described on a loosely inserted separate page.<sup>521</sup> I have not yet discovered an example of such an inserted page in any of the extant *Esther* wordbooks, but the *Athalia* and *Deborah* examples suggest that Carestini's Italian pieces were first performed during *Esther* in March 1735. The insertion of Italian music for Carestini in 1735, and also for Annibali and Conti in 1737, would have required newly copied folios to be inserted in M C/261. These were presumably removed from M C/261 when they used for the second performance of *Israel in Egypt* on 11 April 1739, or on Handel's return to a fully English

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-7.

<sup>519</sup> 'Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*' in *Music in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, edited by David Wyn Jones, Ashgate, 2000. Burrows found the *Athalia* libretto in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection.

<sup>520</sup> Op. cit., p.211.

<sup>521</sup> Also containing additions for Scalzi and Maria Negri, the sheet containing additions in *Deborah* corresponds to the April 1734 revival.



*Esther* in 1740. It is also likely that Handel deliberately wanted Carestini's new Italian arias to be written on separate folios that could have been easily transferred from one conducting score to another. Whatever his reasons were, no autographs are known and the relevant folios that might have been in M C/261 are now lost.

It is impossible to reconstruct the 1735 and 1737 performing versions of *Esther* with the sort of certainty considered sufficient for a scholarly critical edition. Serwer commented that 'unless a libretto or some other document turns up ... reconstruction of what must have been a fascinating example of bi-lingual performance remains beyond our grasp.'<sup>522</sup> However, I have identified traces of the Italian insertions in M C/261, which also contains several alternative Italian texts written above the vocal stave of the original 1732 music. Furthermore, it is possible to construct a speculative bilingual version using the following methods:

- Esther's role can be reconstructed according to what we already know about Strada's performances in 1733b.
- The conducting score M C/261 has indications of singers' names, cues for Italian insertions, probable cuts, and also evidence of music that was reinstated in 1740.
- Later insertions in *Esther* were probably influenced by the position of Italian insertions.

Appendix 4c contains hypothetical reconstructions of Handel's 1735 and 1737 bilingual performance versions of *Esther*. In many instances, my interpretation of the evidence disagrees with the writings of Winton Dean and Howard Serwer. In 1735, the overture and first scene were probably identical to all previous versions. The relevant folios of M C/261 are lost, but Cecilia Young probably performed the Israelite Woman's role in English, and Negri presumably performed Mordecai's music in English (she certainly did so in I.v). In I.ii, Carestini sang 'Endless fame' using the Italian words 'Quella fama', and evidence of a pasted slip over some of the preceding recitative in M C/261 suggests that Handel also

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<sup>522</sup> Op. cit., p. 88.

provided an introductory Italian recitative (now lost). However, the conversation between Assuerus and Haman was probably performed in English. Handel wrote 'Howard' next to Harbonah's recitative in M C/261 f. 35r, confirming that I.iii was retained complete in 1735.

In M C/261 f. 40v, the recitative that begins I.iv has been cut and subsequently reinstated. It is in all extant wordbooks, and singers for 1736 and 1740 are named, so the cut must relate to a bilingual revival. Perhaps the scene began with Esther's 'Tune your harps' in 1735 (as in 1733b). There is no documentary evidence to confirm an Italian insertion for Carestini after 'Tune your harps', but it is plausible that Handel's massive 1751 insertion (2 simple recitatives, 1 accompanied recitative, and 2 arias) is an echo of a substantial insertion in 1735. The libretto text of 'Angelico splendor' fits perfectly in this position (see Appendix 4d), and forms a suitable response to Esther's virtuous praising of the Lord in 'Tune your harps'. The chorus 'Shall we of servitude complain' arguably functions as the Israelites striving to emulate the 'choir of angels' breathing a holy ardour into the noble heart, and the music's rejoicing extrovert style is well suited to this position.<sup>523</sup> Serwer suggested 'Angelico splendor' and 'Bianco giglio' were for Bertolli or Annibali in 1737 owing to their 'third person operatic platitudes'.<sup>524</sup> Annibali could have performed these arias, but Serwer's suggestion that Bertolli sang them was misguided: the Italian insertions found in the *Athalia* and *Deborah* wordbooks are incontrovertible evidence that Carestini certainly performed these Italian arias in oratorios during 1735.

A hypothesis for the content of a bilingual Act II is more problematic. In M C/261 f. 60v, next to 'Dread not, righteous Queen, the danger' (II.ii), a partly-legible inscription in Handel's handwriting looks like 'Mrs Young'. In 1735, Miss Cecilia Young had not yet become Mrs Arne, but the 1735 printed libretto of *Alcina* hints that Handel had the

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<sup>523</sup> Dean noted that 'Angelico splendor' is 'an improvisation in triple time on the main theme of the chorus 'Viver e non amar', added to *Acis and Galatea* in 1732' (Op. cit., p. 211). This chorus had in turn been based upon music from the cantata *Cor fedele* (HWV 96 - see *HHB* vol. II, p. 78).

<sup>524</sup> Op. cit., p. 87.



tendency to confuse her title.<sup>525</sup> The aria was cut in 1737, so the reference to 'Mrs Young' must relate to performances in 1735 and 1736. The duet 'Blessings descend on downy wings' is missing from M C/261, and was omitted from all later wordbooks. It is unlikely that it was performed after 1736, but there is no evidence to imply that Young and Negri could not have sung it in 1735.

Music was certainly inserted before II.iii ('Cor fedele' in 1737, adapted to 'Hope, a pure and lasting treasure' in 1751). However, in 1735 'Cor fedele' was definitely performed by Carestini in III.i, which invites speculation that Carestini performed a different insertion before II.iii in 1735. The only other appropriately substantial music is 'Bianco giglio', with its explosive B section 'Spira un aura'.<sup>526</sup> The full *da capo* libretto text of 'Bianco giglio' in Appendix 4d indicates that the beginning of II.iii is an ideal context. It is a dramatically logical introduction to Assuerus in his throne room, prior to Esther's unbidden arrival, perhaps with the reference to 'winning the palm' being an allegory of the King holding out his golden sceptre.

The only other possible location for the insertion of 'Bianco giglio' in 1735 is after the duet 'Who calls my parting soul from death', but the text makes less sense here. I believe that 'Tua bellezza' was inserted here because the text in Appendix 4d reveals a suitable dramatic response to the duet, and this position corresponds very closely with its English version 'May thy beauty' in 1757. It is improbable that Carestini would have sung the English arias 'O beauteous Queen' and 'How can I stay when love invites', but he must have contributed something to soothe Esther's anxiety. The exact contribution of an Italian Assuerus in II.iii - the most important dramatic scene in the entire oratorio - is the most difficult and enigmatic element to reconstruct for the bilingual *Esther*.

The 1735 version of Act III commenced with 'Jehovah crown'd ... He comes'. Immediately afterwards, Carestini performed 'Cor fedele': M C/261 f. 105r contains the

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<sup>525</sup> Cecilia Young's role of Morgana is ascribed to 'Mrs Young' the *dramatis personae* published in the 1735 wordbook of *Alcina*.

<sup>526</sup> Carestini performed the two sections as separate insertions in *Athalia*, but it is possible that the music was performed as a full *da capo* aria in *Esther*.

faded pencil marking 'Recit & aria Carest.' in Handel's handwriting, and an Italian recitative text that was used to introduce 'Cor fedele' in the 1735 performances of *Athalia*. Carestini presumably sang the recitative 'Now, o my Queen, thy suit declare' in English, and the next two arias for Haman and Esther would not have been cut. Assuerus' aria 'Thro' the nation' was probably cut from the bilingual versions: his recitative 'Guards, seize the traitor' could have led straight into Haman's 'How art thou fallen', as it had in the original Cannons version.

The duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' has Italian words in M C/261 ff. 115r-116r. Dean and Serwer both believed that 'I favor del primo autore' was for the 1737 revival,<sup>527</sup> but M C/261 f. 114v shows that the duet was certainly cut in 1737, and replaced by an aria for Annibali (see Appendix 4c). It is possible that the Italian words are not associated with *Esther*, but instead intended for an entirely different unknown purpose. In 1735, Cecilia Young and Strada could have sung the duet in Italian had Handel wanted them to, but I strongly doubt there was sufficient reason for either singer to do so; it is highly likely that the duet was performed in its usual English version. In 'The Lord our enemy has slain', Handel followed his usual practice of assigning the solo 'Alleluia' sections to his leading *primo uomo*. Carestini might have been able to perform Senesino's version without Handel having to make meaningful alterations.

The 1737 version received only one performance, and it seems unlikely that Handel would have gone to exhaustive trouble preparing revisions during a season that was unusually busy and challenging.<sup>528</sup> Assuming that he had little time or inclination to worry about *Esther*, the 1735 bilingual version prepared for Carestini's benefit would certainly have served as a model. The use of soprano castrato Conti and the return of Bertolli (who had performed the role of Mordecai in 1732) certainly influenced changes to the 1735 scheme. Furthermore, that season Handel made notably drastic cuts to recitatives in his

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<sup>527</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 211; Serwer: Op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>528</sup> See Chapter 1 for my discussion of the 1736-7 season.



Italian opera revivals, and I suspect that this policy could have also had an impact on *Esther*.

In the opening scene, 'Watchful angels' was given the Italian text 'Pure menti' for Conti.<sup>529</sup> Handel wrote instructions to transpose the aria down from G to E flat on two occasions: one is certainly for Frasi in 1751, but it is unlikely that the other occasion was for Conti in 1737: the castrato's top Cs in *Arminio* suggest that high range was not a problem for him.<sup>530</sup> According to *See and Seem Blind*, Bertolli had struggled to sing in English in 1732, but she probably sang the 1732 version of Moredecai's part in the opening scene. M C/261 f. 32v confirms that Annibali sang Carestini's 'Quella fama', but I suspect that his recitative in I.iii was reduced to the essential minimum. I.iv was probably similar to the previous bilingual version: if 'Angelico splendor' was inserted here for Carestini in 1735, it could have been repeated in 1737. If so, it was probably sung by Conti, who would have required an upward transposition.<sup>531</sup> In I.v, Bertolli probably sang music that she had already performed in 1732 and 1733a.

'Cor fedele' was inserted in II.ii for Annibali,<sup>532</sup> in the same position as its English version 'Hope, a pure and lasting treasure' was used in 1751. This makes my suggestion that Carestini sang 'Bianco giglio' during this scene in 1735 redundant for Annibali in 1737, and the rest of the original scene was probably omitted. It is probable that Annibali sang 'Tua bellezza' in II.iii - the music is within alto castrato range, and there is no evidence, musical element, or logical dramatic reason to support Dean's belief that it was sung by the soprano castrato Conti. The lack of tenor indications for 1737 in M C/261, and the position of 'May thy beauty' (an English version of 'Tua bellezza') before the

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<sup>529</sup> Cfm MU MS 251 pp. 34-5 (see Appendices 4c and 4d).

<sup>530</sup> The second occasion was probably for Mrs Cibber in the 1744a version of *Deborah*.

<sup>531</sup> Handel planned to assign 'Angelico splendor' to Conti in the aborted 1737 revival of *Deborah* (see Appendix 5c footnote 171).

<sup>532</sup> M C/261 f. 60v contains Handel's cue 'Sig. Annibali Cor fedele'. This is further evidence to show Winton Dean's assumption that this was for Conti in 1737 was misconceived (Op. cit., p.211). In fact, Conti's role in the 1737 revival of *Esther* may have been quite small, and the alto castrato Annibali probably had the greater share of insertions.

concluding chorus of Part 2 in 1757, suggest that II.iv was cut in 1737, leading straight to the anthem 'God is our Hope'.

Most of Act III was probably the same as in 1735. Reinhold certainly sang both of Haman's arias. M C/261 f. 114v contains Handel's faded pencil marking 'Annibali aria', which replaced the duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story'. If one assumes that Annibali would have sung an Italian aria originally prepared for Carestini in 1735, the most likely candidate to fill this position is 'Bianco giglio'. There is no other plausible position in 1737 where it could conceivably fit without feeling out of place: it is the most climactic and magnificent of all the Italian insertions in terms of its musical scope and theatrical style, its moralizing text provides an apt moral conclusion to the drama, and it is an appropriate conclusion to the oratorio. The possible feature of a massive solo for Annibali prior to 'The Lord our enemy has slain' also explains why he did not sing the solo 'Alleluia' sections during the chorus: neither Annibali's stamina or the audience's patience would have stood the test. M C/261 f. 116v contains the cue 'segue aria [...] Sigr Conti' above the basso continuo part at the beginning of 'The Lord our enemy has slain', and this corresponds with a more elaborate solo 'Alleluia' for soprano that is at the Fitzwilliam Museum.<sup>533</sup>

### **The Missing English *Esther*, 1736**

Two performances of *Esther* at Covent Garden in April 1736 featured a cast that would have performed in English.<sup>534</sup> The performance version in 1736 was based on 1733a, with the small 1732 elements reinstated at Oxford (1733b) perhaps omitted. Strada and Young's roles would have been retained without significant changes, although it is uncertain if cuts made to accommodate Italian insertions in 1735 were reinstated. The Dublin 1742 version omits the duet 'Blessings descend' and Esther's 'Tears assist me', and perhaps this had some precedent in 1736 or 1740.

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<sup>533</sup> Cfm MU MS 251 pp. 40-3 (see Appendix 4a, footnote 101).

<sup>534</sup> See Appendix 4b for details of the probable cast.



Haman's role was sung without cuts by the bass Erard.<sup>535</sup> Not much is known about Erard, but the superb bass solos in *Alexander's Feast* composed for him show that Haman's role would not have presented him with any technical problems.<sup>536</sup> Handel's annotations in M C/261 reveal that the secondary tenor roles were sung in 1736 by Thomas Salway,<sup>537</sup> whose recitative 'Jerusalem no more shall mourn' was included after its probable omission in 1735, although Strada would have sung 'Tune your harps'. Mordecai was sung by William Savage, who, during the previous season, had sung Oberto in *Alcina* as a boy soprano. On M C/261 f. 50r, Handel's wrote 'Mr Savage' next to 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide'. Savage's casting in an alto role implies that his voice had started breaking, although on the same folio Handel wrote the transposition instruction 'Un tuono più Basso [...]'. The incomplete character of the instruction leaves it open to ambiguity, but it cannot have been for the 1751 revival when John Beard did not sing this aria. It is not impossible that the music was transposed in 1736 for Savage, whose voice was perhaps breaking more quickly and deeply than initially anticipated. M C/261 f. 60v reveals that Savage sang 'Dread not, righteous Queen, the danger' in 1736, but it is not clear if this was the soprano version (1733a -1735) or the alto version (1732).

Elements of the Cannons score must have been restored to enable John Beard to perform Assuerus. Features created for Senesino in 1732 were treated in different ways: vocal parts were minimally altered;<sup>538</sup> other music was transposed and perhaps abridged. 'Thro' the nation', probably cut in 1735 and 1737, was transposed down a fifth whenever it was sung by Beard. M C/261 contains an abridged version not duplicated in any known wordbooks, and this could have been introduced for Beard in 1736 or 1740.<sup>539</sup> The solos in 'The Lord our enemy has slain' are attributed to Beard in M C/261 f. 116v, and he could

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<sup>535</sup> Handel wrote Erard's name on M C/261 f. 107r ('Turn not, o Queen'), and on f. 114r ('How art thou fallen from thy height').

<sup>536</sup> Dean's copy of an *Alexander's Feast* wordbook contains anonymous marginalia that insinuates Erard was 'German'. ('An unrecognized Handel singer: Carlo Arrigoni' in *MT*, July 1977, p. 558).

<sup>537</sup> Handel wrote 'Salway' on M C/261 f. 35r, by Harbonah's recitative.

<sup>538</sup> Assuerus' vocal part in 'Who calls my parting soul from death' might have been an altered version of 1732 rather than a literal restoration of the original tenor part - Handel's alterations to the vocal part in M C/261 do not follow the Cannons original.

<sup>539</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 99.

only have sung these in 1736: this version of the chorus was discarded when Beard sang Assuerus in 1740 and never used again.<sup>540</sup> There is scant evidence in M C/261 of what Beard's solo was in the final chorus of *Esther* in 1736, but only two weeks later he sang solo 'Alleluia' interjections that demanded uncomfortably high *tessitura* in a similar conclusion to the anthem *Sing unto God* (HWV 263), performed at the wedding of Prince Frederick of Wales and Princess Augusta of Saxony on 27 April 1736.<sup>541</sup> The anthem was adapted from the final chorus of *Parnasso in Festa*, in which Carestini had sung the solos. Handel's hasty and seemingly unfinished adaptation made arduous technical demands on the tenor,<sup>542</sup> but shows that Beard was capable of singing precisely this kind of castrato music, albeit with some alteration. Perhaps Senesino's solos in 'The Lord our enemy has slain' were also marginally altered, without Handel providing the more radical form of revision created for Conti in 1737.

An annotation in M C/261 f. 32v shows that Handel assigned 'Quella fama' to 'Arrigoni'. Carlo Arrigoni was a Florentine theorbist who had probably played in Handel's opera orchestra before defecting to the Opera of the Nobility in 1733. He was also an accomplished composer and tenor.<sup>543</sup> Arrigoni sang some inserted Italian music in the first performances of *Alexander's Feast* in March 1736, which supports the possibility that he might have sung 'Quella fama' in *Esther*.<sup>544</sup> However, the same folio shows that Handel also wrote John Beard's name on several occasions, so there is no conclusive proof that Handel's allocation of the aria to Arrigoni corresponds to a performance of *Esther*.<sup>545</sup> His transposition indications clarify that either an Italian or an English tenor would have sung the aria in G.

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<sup>540</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 101.

<sup>541</sup> The performance material and autograph of the anthem are lost, but the Tenbury manuscript infers that Beard performed the solos in 'And let all the people say'. I am grateful to Donald Burrows for this information (personal communication).

<sup>542</sup> Burrows: *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, pp. 349-51.

<sup>543</sup> Dean: 'An unrecognized Handel singer', *Op. cit.*, pp. 556-8. Dean discusses Arrigoni's life and career, and clarifies his role in the performances of *Alexander's Feast*. However, Dean does not appear to have known that Handel had included Arrigoni's name in the conducting score of *Esther*.

<sup>544</sup> Arrigoni did not sing any arias from *Alexander's Feast*, but took the tenor part in the cantata 'Cecilia, volgi un sguardo' (HWV 89), which served as an interlude.

<sup>545</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 71.



## The Enigmatic *Esther*, 1740

Handel's career changed drastically after the turmoil and rivalry of the 1736-7 season, which included the climax of his competition with the Opera of the Nobility.<sup>546</sup>

Heidegger's attempt to join the remnants of the two struggling companies together during the 1737-8 season failed to provide a long-term solution. Handel's new opera *Faramondo*, produced on 3 January 1738, managed a run of eight performances. The pasticcio 'Oratorio' was organised for Handel's own financial benefit, and performed on 28 March 1738. His other new opera *Serse* was produced on 15 April 1738, but abandoned after only five performances, making it less popular than the self-pasticcio *Alessandro Severo* (performed six times). We assume that Handel directed all nineteen performances of these three works in the early part of 1738, but it is unlikely that he was involved in the opera company's further nineteen performances of works by other composers. Handel consequently avoided performing Italian operas for several years.<sup>547</sup>

Heidegger failed to raise an adequate subscription to mount an opera season in 1738-9. In an analysis of this period in Handel's career, Donald Burrows noted that 'For the moment, opera patronage in London seemed to be an exhausted seam, and Handel appears to have recognized this.'<sup>548</sup> Handel arranged with Heidegger to mount his own season of concerts at the King's Theatre, which ran from January until May 1739. The inclusion of two major new works (*Saul* and *Israel in Egypt*), a pasticcio (*Giove in Argo*, an Italian self-pasticcio that was probably not staged), and revivals (*Alexander's Feast* and *Il Trionfo del Tempo*) is resonant of the approach Handel had taken to planning seasons since 1729, but the absence of operas and inclusion of two impressive new English works is a clear precedent for how Handel's career was to transform over the next few years.

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<sup>546</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the 1736-7 season. Handel's serious health problems in summer 1737 prevented him from planning new operas for the following season. After recovering enough to recommence work, Handel started composing the new opera *Faramondo*. However, London theatre life was further disrupted by Queen Caroline's death in November 1737.

<sup>547</sup> Although his first draft of *Imeneo* was composed in 1738.

<sup>548</sup> *Handel*, p. 202.

Burrows commented that Handel's total of fifteen performances 'must have seemed inadequate to the regular patrons of the King's Theatre who were used to about 50 opera performances in a season.'<sup>549</sup>

Most biographers portray Handel deciding to abandon Italian opera at around this time. Burrows observed that 'From his experience of the previous two seasons Handel may reasonably have concluded by mid-1739 that, first, there was no future for him in the continuation of opera under the old scheme ... and, secondly, that it was difficult to sustain a complete oratorio-based season in London's premier opera theatre.'<sup>550</sup> David Hunter recently presented a convincing detailed analysis that Handel's moving away from Italian opera seasons to shorter oratorio seasons was enforced by chronic illness from 1737 until the end of the composer's life twenty-two years later. Hunter summarised:

Whatever the immediate causes for Handel's decisions to write and publicly perform the first few English-language works, the intensification of that practice after 1737 was due in large measure to the challenges posed by lead poisoning and its ensuing saturnine gout, and an increasing debility exacerbated by obesity. In other words, the illnesses should be considered as an integral element in the switch by Handel to writing his late works, the major oratorios.<sup>551</sup>

Irrespective of the true reasons for Handel's evolving career in the late 1730s, the process of disengaging from opera projects was gradual. His last two new operas were performed between November 1740 (*Imeneo*, only two performances) and January 1741 (*Deidamia*, three performances).<sup>552</sup> However, an impending change is plainly evident in Handel's 1739-40 season, when he presented a concert series of entirely English works at John

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>551</sup> 'Miraculous Recovery? Handel's Illnesses, The Narrative Tradition of Heroic Strength and the Oratorio Turn' in *Eighteenth-century Music*, Vol. 3 No. 2, September 2006, pp. 253.

<sup>552</sup> Notwithstanding these last two Italian operas, the bulk of Handel's 1740-1 season concentrated on revivals of *Acis*, *Saul*, *L'Allegro*, and *Parnasso in Festa*.



Rich's old theatre at Lincoln's Inn Fields.<sup>553</sup> This was inaugurated on St Cecilia's Day with a performance of Handel's new setting of Dryden's Cecilian ode 'From harmony, heav'nly harmony', which was performed with *Alexander's Feast* - his previous setting of the Dryden's other Cecilian text. This programme was performed twice, before the shorter Ode was carried over into three performances of *Acis and Galatea*, given in its only entirely English revival under Handel's direction.

In the meantime, Lord Middlesex launched a new opera company at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket in December 1739, which resulted in Handel's English theatre concerts being the principal competition for Italian operas.<sup>554</sup> This was an unfamiliar situation for Handel, who had spent most of his London career since 1711 presenting Italian operas in competition against native talent. A severe winter prevented any further performances until the end of February 1740, when Handel's new ode *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*, based on poetry by Milton adapted by James Harris and Charles Jennens, was first performed. It is curious to note that after the uncertainty surrounding Handel's career and health in the previous few years, the *Ode for St Cecilia* and *L'Allegro* both illustrate the composer in superb form. A single performance of *Saul* on 21 March 1740 consolidated Handel's stature as an outstanding 'English' theatre composer. Single performances of *Esther*, *Acis and Galatea* (with the *Ode for St Cecilia*), *Israel in Egypt*, and *L'Allegro* concluded the season. Burrows observed that 'it seems remarkable that Handel should have gone to the trouble of rehearsing each work, and adapting the music to the current cast in each case, for single performances'.<sup>555</sup>

Handel was a good judge of his own work, as is proved by his consistently astute self-borrowing throughout his career. Handel could have been fully conscious that both of his new works for the 1739-40 season showed his talent for English theatre music at its

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<sup>553</sup> See Appendix 1b, Figure 1.

<sup>554</sup> The end of Handel's involvement with Italian operas, and the formation of Middlesex's company, are described in Carole Taylor: 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', in *Handel Tercentenary Collection* (see bibliography).

<sup>555</sup> Op. cit., p. 210.

most poetic and descriptive. The entirely English version of *Acis and Galatea* suggests that Handel recognized the merit of it without bilingual accretions, and by adding performances of *Esther*, *Saul*, and *Israel in Egypt*, he gave his audience reasonably strong and coherent versions of his most impressive English repertoire. The 1739-40 season is a thoughtfully balanced collection of works that includes both diverse examples of old works, and imaginative new ones. This implies that Handel made an unusually special effort to make the overall season as artistically strong as possible, notwithstanding its shorter duration than the average Italian opera season.

It was into this context that the 1740 version of *Esther* was produced. There is no extant libretto, but M C/261 reveals traces of the singers names: the title role was sung by Francesina, the Israelite Woman by Mrs Arne, Assuerus by John Beard, and smaller parts appear to have been sung by the countertenor John Immyns and tenors Corfe and Williams. It seems that Handel's 1740 *Esther* was dramatically sensible and musically neat. The single performance appears to have been condensed slightly from the 1736 version. The sources indicate the following elements of the 1740 version:

- 'Breathe soft ye gales': reassigned to the Israelite Woman for the first time since 1732, but vocal part rewritten for Mrs. Arne (Cfm MU MS 251 p.31 'Mrs Arne', Handel, in pencil).
- 'Watchful angels': sung by Mrs Arne as in previous versions, but transposed down to F major (Cfm MU MS 251 p.34: 'Arne ex F', Handel, in pencil). It is curious to note that before her marriage, Miss Cecilia Young had always sung this in G. Perhaps her voice had lowered slightly in pitch by 1740.
- Esther's recitative 'O King of Kings' and 'Alleluia' aria probably sung by Francesina without alterations.
- Assuerus' aria 'Endless fame' transposed into G for Beard (M C/261 f. 32v: 'Mr Beard ex g'). Beard would have repeated the role as it had appeared in 1736, apart from the loss of his solos in 'The Lord our enemy has slain'.
- Harbonah's recitative performed (M C/261 f. 35r: 'Williams'), therefore scene performed without cuts



- The Officer's recitative 'Our souls with ardour glow' and chorus 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' reinstated for the first time since 1733b (M C/261 f. 37v 'Williams' and 'Stat').
- Israelite recitative 'Jerusalem no more shall mourn' included, and sung by either Corfe or Williams (both tenors named on M C/261 f. 40v).
- 'Tune your harps' probably sung by Williams, using the tenor version from c. 1718, restored for the first time (see Appendix 4a footnote 75). If Williams sang the aria, perhaps 'Mr Corf' sang the preceding recitative.
- Mrs Arne probably sang the recitative 'Shall we of servitude complain?' and the aria 'Praise the Lord', as in 1735-7.
- M C/261 does not clearly mention 'Mr Immens' (countertenor John Immyns) in association with 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide'. However, there is one pencil marking that is now illegible, and it is difficult to imagine that the aria and its preceding accompanied recitative were omitted.
- M C/261 f. 60r reveals that the scene for Mordecai and Esther ('Why sits that sorrow on thy brow') was performed complete, by 'Francesina' and 'Mr Immens'. f. 60v indicates that Immyns sang 'Dread not, righteous Queen, the danger'.
- The 1737 and 1742 versions suggest that Esther's recitative 'I go the power of grief to prove' and aria 'Tears assist me' were probably omitted in 1740. The duet 'Blessings descend' was cut in 1737, and I suspect that it was never reinstated.
- The recitative 'With joy his inward visage glows' was sung by 'Mr Williams' (M C/261 f. 73v).
- The anthem now featured the words 'Blessed are all they that fear the Lord' (see Appendix 4a, footnote 96).
- 'Jehovah crown'd' was transferred to the Israelite Woman, and sung by Mrs Arne (M C/261 f. 97r: 'Mrs Arne', Handel in pencil).
- M C/261 f. 115v reveals that the duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' was sung by Francesina and Mrs Arne.

- ‘The Lord our enemy has slain’ was simplified to a fully choral setting without solo interjections (this version is now in M C/261, and written on a paper-type that dates from 1740).

Dean’s confident assertion that the 1740 performance of *Esther* contained three Italian insertions for the trilingual Francesina is certainly wrong,<sup>556</sup> although she had sung them in the second performance of *Israel in Egypt* on 11 April 1739.

### *Esther* in Dublin, 1742

Handel’s concert season at Dublin between December 1741 and June 1742 has been described by Donald Burrows.<sup>557</sup> Appendix 1b Figure 2 presents information about all of Handel’s Dublin concerts. Apart from containing two unstaged performances of *Imeneo*, advertised as the ‘serenata’ *Hymen*, all the concerts were of Handel’s English theatre works. The only new work was *Messiah*, which was probably not intended as part of the subscription series, and its librettist Charles Jennens had expected it to be first performed in London. Most of Handel’s programmes were performed twice, although *Esther* was performed three times. However, rather than this being an indication of greater popularity, the third performance on 7 April could have been a stalling tactic to keep the public satisfied while preparations were made for the first performance of *Messiah* a week later. I cannot be sure that the exact distribution of recitatives and arias between singers was the same on 7 April as it had been almost a month earlier.

Unlike the London revivals between 1735 and 1740, wordbooks for Handel’s Dublin performances of *Esther* have survived, and we can reconstruct a reasonably precise performance version. Paradoxically, we know very little about the singers that Handel used. On 2 December 1741, Charles Jennens wrote that John Beard should have gone to

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<sup>556</sup> *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorios*, p. 212.

<sup>557</sup> ‘Handel’s Dublin Performances’ in *Irish Musical Studies 4: Part One* (Ed. Devine & White), Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1996.



Ireland, but that he was prevented from going by his contract at Drury Lane.<sup>558</sup> The only known members of the cast for *Esther* in Dublin are the soprano Avolio, the tenor Calloghan, and the alto Mrs Cibber. Handel apparently took two more soloists with him from London, Miss Edwards and Mrs Maclean, and perhaps one of them might have sung the Israelite Woman, but neither singer is mentioned in any of the sources I have examined. After the first performance of the season, Handel wrote to Jennens that he had found a good tenor soloist: presumably this was either Calloghan or Bayly.<sup>559</sup> Handel also reported that 'the Basses and Counter Tenors are very good',<sup>560</sup> which raises the possibility that some of these Dublin singers were capable of singing the other solo roles, including the First Israelite, Harbonah, or Haman.

Burrows suggested that the version of *Alexander's Feast* performed on 17 February 1742 featured only soprano, alto, and tenor soloists (Avolio, Cibber, and Calloghan), and that there was no adequate bass soloist available.<sup>561</sup> It is possible that a suitable bass might have appeared by the time *Esther* was performed two months later, although Burrows speculated that 'since the part is not very low in tessitura, I suppose that it would have been possible for Calloghan to have stepped rather incongruously from one character to another.'<sup>562</sup> Haman's two arias in the final part were retained intact, but 'How art thou fallen from thy height' is too low for most mortal tenors to manage. I imagine that an inexperienced bass was cast as Haman: it is unlikely that Handel would have sanctioned one singer performing a dialogue between two characters (I.ii), even if desperate times enforced unusual compromises.

Handel relied upon local singers and instrumentalists to constitute his Dublin chorus and orchestra, both of which were presumably smaller than in London. Although

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<sup>558</sup> Letter from Jennens to Edward Holdsworth, dated 2 December 1741, quoted in Burrows, *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>559</sup> Very little is known of the enigmatic tenor Calloghan, but it is possible he was the same person as the orchestra musician Callaghan MacCarty active at the Aungier Street Theatre between 1735 and 1742. See John C. Greene & Gladys L.H. Clark: *The Dublin Stage 1720-1745: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments, and Afterpieces*, Leigh University Press, Bethlehem USA, 1993, p. 67.

<sup>560</sup> Letter from Handel to Jennens, 29 December 1741, repr. in *Deutsch*.

<sup>561</sup> Burrows: *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

M C/261 does not show any sign of orchestrations being simplified, Burrows insisted that ‘we have to take seriously the ... possibility that Handel produced at least some of his Dublin performances with a reduced scoring: there are various ways in which you could fudge the scores in the absence of bassoons, trombones, a harp or even horns’.<sup>563</sup> With this context in mind, it is sensible to deduce that any revisions to *Esther* for Dublin had to be simple, practical, and more likely to shorten the 1740 version than complicate it. Unfortunately, M C/261 offers very little illumination: Burrows noted that ‘So multifarious were Handel’s revivals of *Esther* that it is difficult to allocate voice parts with confidence on the basis on surviving musical sources.’<sup>564</sup>

The 1740 version of ‘Breathe soft ye gales’ made for Mrs Arne was retained, and the Dublin wordbook claims it was sung by the 1<sup>st</sup> Israelite. Avolio presumably sang Esther’s role much as Francesina had performed it in 1740, but her ‘Alleluia’ was cut. Several lines of recitative were cut from the conversation between Haman and Assuerus. Handel wrote Calloghan’s name on the conducting score of ‘Endless fame’, from which we can infer that it was performed in its G major version, and that Calloghan performed Assuerus’ role in a similar form to Beard’s version in 1736 and 1740.<sup>565</sup> Mrs Cibber would have sung the role of Mordecai, perhaps doubling as the 1<sup>st</sup> Israelite, and some illegible pencil markings on M C/261 f. 97r suggest that she sang ‘Jehovah crown’d’. Haman’s ‘Pluck, root, and branch’ was omitted, along with most of his preceding recitative. ‘Tune your harps’ was sung by the ‘Second Israelite’, but it is not clear if this was a soprano or tenor.<sup>566</sup> The Cannons recitative text ‘O God, who from the suckling’s mouth’ replaced ‘Shall we of servitude complain’. ‘Praise the Lord’ was assigned to a ‘Third Israelite’ in the 1742 wordbook, who was presumably a soprano. Perhaps Handel played the harp solo part on the organ.<sup>567</sup> The rest of Act I was performed without cuts.

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<sup>563</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-8.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>565</sup> M C/261 f. 32v. Handel actually writes ‘Callighan’.

<sup>566</sup> I suspect that a Dublin-based tenor, maybe Bayley, sang the Cannons version.

<sup>567</sup> See Appendix 4a footnote 78.



Mrs Cibber probably sang Bertolli's 1732 music as Mordecai, and her 'Dread not, righteous Queen' was followed directly by the throne-room scene. The Israelite's recitative 'With inward joy his visage glows' was reduced, and 'his' recitative 'The King will listen to his Royal fair' led directly into 'Jehovah crown'd'. Assuerus' 'Thro' the nation' and the chorus 'All applauding crowds' were omitted. The 1740 fully choral version of 'The Lord our enemy has slain' was shortened, with its middle section 'Sing songs of praise' suppressed:<sup>568</sup> the wordbook's inclusion of a 'Hallelujah' is certainly an error. Both coronation anthems were cut.

### *Esther* in 1751

Handel's next performance of *Esther* was nine years later. By this time, he had firmly established his routine of English oratorio seasons during Lent. His Covent Garden seasons during the 1750s reveal how the number of performances had considerably reduced since his earlier periods of intense opera production. The average annual number of eleven performances at Covent Garden, with an additional performance of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital each May, was a far cry from the 1736-7 opera season that contained at least forty-eight performances.<sup>569</sup> Obviously, circumstances such as Handel's age and allegedly chronic health problems played a part in the massive discrepancy, although the London theatre season was curtailed to only eight performances by the unexpected death of the Prince of Wales on 20 March 1751.<sup>570</sup>

The curtailment of the season did not change the overall nature of Handel's programme. The pace of his performance calendar illustrates that the composer no longer devoted most his year to musical activity, but he still sought to offer variety to his

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<sup>568</sup> This line is consistently misprinted in all wordbooks as 'Sing Hymns of Praise'.

<sup>569</sup> Compare Appendix 1b figures 4-7 with Appendix 1a figure 9.

<sup>570</sup> Handel intended to give one more performance of *Judas Maccabaeus* on 22 March (Burrows: *Handel*, p. 351), and probably hoped to present a few more concerts after that.

audience.<sup>571</sup> In early July 1750, Handel composed *The Choice of Hercules* using music that he had composed six months previously for an abandoned production of Tobias Smollett's play *Alceste*. *The Choice of Hercules* was the only new work presented in the 1751 season, and was first performed on 1 March. The length of time between Handel's composition of a short masque and its eventual performance is a striking contrast to *Partenope* in 1730, which had been finished on 12 February and performed twelve days later. Clearly, the sixty-five-year-old composer was not able or willing to work under the same intensive pressure that he had been accustomed to during his opera career.

However, Handel was clearly not idle. After completing composition of *The Choice of Hercules*, he made a trip to the Netherlands.<sup>572</sup> This was to be Handel's final journey to the continent, and upon his return he composed his last instrumental work,<sup>573</sup> prepared revisions for his 1751 concerts, and began composing his last oratorio *Jephtha*. Perhaps Handel hoped that *Jephtha* would provide a major new work to conclude the season, but by 13 February 1751 he was experiencing considerable difficulty composing it due to the deterioration of his eyesight, and abandoned work on it for four months.<sup>574</sup>

It seems that Handel's eyesight was adequate for him to prepare the revised version of *Esther*, which received a single performance, on 15 March 1751. M C/261 contains markings where he has indicated all the members of his 1751 cast: Frasi (Esther), Guadagni (Assuerus), Beard (Mordecai), Galli (Israelite), Reinhold (Haman), and Thomas Lowe (the new role 'Priest Israelite'). M C/261 also includes many folios inserted and recopied on paper that dates from 1751. If M C/261 is compared with a 1751 wordbook of *Esther* in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, it is relatively simple to get a precise idea of what was performed on 15 March 1751. Frasi, as Esther, performed Mrs Arne's 1740

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<sup>571</sup> Although the failure of *Theodora* to attract the audiences it deserved in 1750 shows that Handel's audience were still capable of under-appreciating the quality of his dramatic invention.

<sup>572</sup> For an account of Handel's visit to the Netherlands, see Richard G. King: 'Handel's Travels in the Netherlands in 1750' in *ML*, August 1991.

<sup>573</sup> Organ concerto HWV 308.

<sup>574</sup> In the autograph manuscript of *Jephtha*, Handel indicated near the end of Part 2 that he could not continue composing due to problems with his left eye. On 18 June, he indicated that he had resumed composing the rest of the oratorio. Summarized in Burrows: *Handel*, pp. 349-53.



version of 'Breathe soft ye gales', and 'Watchful Angels' was transposed down to E flat (see Appendix 4a, footnote 68). Her recitative 'O King of Kings' was rewritten in order to allow modulation directly into the anthem *My heart is inditing*.

In the following scene, the recitatives for Haman and Assuerus were amended, with Haman's lines restored after having been cut for Dublin in 1742. The castrato Guadagni would have sung 'Endless fame' using Senesino's 1732 version. Harbonah's recitative 'Tis greater far to spare than to destroy' was sung by the bass John Cox, presumably without alteration.<sup>575</sup> Reinhold sang all Haman's arias, including the reinstated 'Pluck root and branch', which was omitted only in Dublin in 1742. This was followed immediately by the chorus 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?'

Thomas Lowe performed the character of 'Priest Israelite', fulfilling a similar function as the alto High Priest in the Cannons original version. Lowe sang the Cannons version of 'Tune your harps', after which Frasi performed 'No more disconsolate' - an insertion borrowed from *Deborah*. Handel made a larger insertion for Lowe, with the recitative 'Now persecution shall lay down her iron rod' (a text unused by Handel since about 1718), an accompanied recitative 'Methinks I see each stately tow'r rise',<sup>576</sup> and the aria 'Sacred raptures', which Handel had composed for Lowe in *Solomon* in 1749.<sup>577</sup> The chorus 'Shall we of servitude complain' was reinstated by Handel for the first time since Cannons, but 'Praise the Lord' was cut, evidently supplanted by the succession of insertions that preceded its position.

Although Beard performed the role of Mordecai, his contribution was reduced, with 'Methinks I hear ... O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide' transferred to the soprano Galli.<sup>578</sup> However, Handel gave Beard a new recitative 'Haste to the King' before 'Dread not,

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<sup>575</sup> M C/261 f. 35r: 'Mr Cox'.

<sup>576</sup> This accompanied recitative uses a text rejected from the old autograph of the Cannons score, and music based on Zadok's 'See! from the op'ning skies' from *Solomon*. In both *Solomon* and *Esther* the recitative was used to precede 'Sacred Raptures', although Handel reset the orchestral parts slightly for the text in *Esther*.

<sup>577</sup> Although Beard is also named on M C/261 f. 44v, this corresponds to the 1756 revival of *Israel in Egypt* (see Appendix 4a, footnote 76).

<sup>578</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 79.

righteous Queen', and it is curious that the new recitative text is a rejected text from the autograph of the Cannons version.<sup>579</sup> Beard's 'Dread not, righteous Queen' was the first time that Handel had assigned it for a tenor in E flat since about 1718/9, but the vocal line in M C/261 is a transposed version of Senesino's 1732 part.

Esther's recitative 'I go the power of grief to prove' and aria 'Tears assist me' was reinstated, but transposed up to A minor for Frasi, and the chorus 'Save us, O Lord!' was also reinstated: neither had been performed since 1732. The 1751 libretto has an unassigned recitative 'O Heav'n, protect her', followed by the inserted aria 'Hope, a pure and lasting Treasure'. M C/261 shows that Handel entertained different thoughts about who should sing this insertion, which is an English arrangement of 'Cor fedele', the Italian insertion sung by Carestini in 1735 and Annibali in 1737. Handel adjusted the recitative to fit Esther ('O Heav'n, protect me'), which he could not have done in 1757 owing to his blindness. Printed wordbooks confirm that Frasi sang the recitative in 1757, although without a subsequent aria. It makes sense that Frasi also sang it in 1751, and the lack of an indication for a character in the 1751 wordbook might be an assumption that the character contributing before the chorus 'Save us, o Lord!' continued afterwards. If so, perhaps the printing of the recitative in the third person might be an uncorrected error.<sup>580</sup>

The recitative 'With inward Joy his visage glows' was performed by the Priest Israelite, which was followed by an insertion 'Virtue, truth, and innocence', that takes a chorus text from the Cannons version and fits it to the music of the air 'When the sun o'er yonder hill' from *Solomon*. M C/261 f. 97r reveals that Handel initially wanted to assign 'Jehovah crown'd' to Guadagni, which would have made musical sense, but would have presented the incongruous dramatic situation of Assuerus introducing the chorus 'He comes' when he has already arrived. Handel also wrote 'Mr Low' and 'Priest altered for tenor', which proves that the splendid accompanied recitative was performed by Lowe.

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., footnote 17.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., footnote 22, and Appendix 4b.



However, there is no evidence of exactly how much, or how little, the vocal part was adapted for Lowe.

Most of the rest of the oratorio was performed in its 1732 version, although it is possible that Guadagni could have sung the abridged version of 'Thro the nation' indicated on the full version in M C/261.<sup>581</sup> The wordbook claims that 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' was sung by Mordecai and Esther, but there is no evidence in M C/261 to support the idea that Beard ever sang in the duet section, which appears to have always been sung by two sopranos. However, M C/261 f. 115v-116r does contain evidence that a shorter version might have been used at some stage, either without the second verse or featuring a rewritten version of it. Galli is not named on the manuscript, and it is possible that it was adapted into a solo for Frasi, or that Galli only sang in the final section.<sup>582</sup> Both coronation anthems were reinstated.

### *Esther in 1757*

After the 1751 season, Handel continued directing performances despite being blind in his left eye, but in the summer of 1752 he suffered what seems to have been a stroke,<sup>583</sup> after which he lost his eyesight completely. Despite this adversity, Handel continued to supervise oratorio seasons each Lent until his death in 1759, but he could not have personally conducted performances, nor prepared the necessary alterations and insertions for oratorio revivals after 1752 by himself. Neither could Handel have arranged the 1757 'new' work *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, based on earlier music but with some small new additions, without assistance.

All instructions, corrections, and insertions in M C/261 that were made in 1757 were written by John Christopher Smith jr, the son of Handel's principal copyist, and the composer's only pupil to pursue a career as a professional musician. Anthony Hicks has

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<sup>581</sup> ff. 110<sup>a</sup>-111.

<sup>582</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 100.

<sup>583</sup> Reported in the *General Advertiser* on 17 August 1752, repr. in *Deutsch*.

closely examined the role of the younger Smith in Handel's oratorio texts after 1753, and concluded that 'Smith's involvement may well have been more than that of an amanuensis.'<sup>584</sup> Hicks observed that 'Smith was a competent and active composer in his own right', and therefore judged that apparently new music inserted into oratorio performances after 1753 'must therefore be treated with suspicion'. For this reason, it is difficult to discern the precise extent of Handel's personal involvement in the several new insertions made to *Esther* in 1757, although on 8 February 1757, shortly before the performances, the Earl of Shaftesbury wrote that 'Mr Handel is better than he has been for some years: and finds he can compose chorus's as well as other music, to his own (and consequently to the hearers) satisfaction.'<sup>585</sup>

Appendix 1b Figure 7 shows that the 1757 season commenced with two performances of *Esther*, followed by single performances of *Israel in Egypt*, *Joseph and his Brethren*, and *Judas Maccabaeus*. The season concluded with performances of *Messiah*, which after its cool reception in 1743 had now become an established fixed feature of Handel's Lenten seasons. The middle of the season was devoted to four performances of the 'new' oratorio *The Triumph of Time and Truth*, which was an English adaptation of the 1737 version of *Il Trionfo del Tempo*,<sup>586</sup> featuring music recycled from *Parnasso in Festa*, the 1732 *Acis and Galatea*, the Foundling Hospital Anthem (HWV 268), and, less obviously, *Lotario*.<sup>587</sup> It is notable that none of the oratorios performed was particularly dramatic in nature, but all were good examples of oratorio as elaborate concerts rather than character-driven music theatre.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>584</sup> 'The late additions to Handel's oratorios and the role of the younger Smith' in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Hogwood & Lockett, Cambridge, 1983, p. 149.

<sup>585</sup> Letter to James Harris (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 321). Donald Burrows suggests that perhaps Handel was more able to influence the content of performing versions than to compose new music in 1757 (personal communication).

<sup>586</sup> The libretto was probably adapted by Thomas Morell. Burrows notes that 'There is an obvious and attractive biographical symmetry to the idea that Handel marked the close of his career with a revival of his first Roman oratorio of 1707.' (*Handel*, p. 364).

<sup>587</sup> Although in 1752 Handel had also used music from *Lotario* for Jephtha's 'Open, o marble jaws', so perhaps the similar use of material from *Lotario* in 1757 should not seem surprising.

<sup>588</sup> For an analysis of the 1757 season, see Burrows: Op. cit., pp. 364-5.



Printed librettos for the 1757 *Esther* show that last-minute alterations to the words were pasted over 1751 texts. For example, 'May thy beauty' was printed on a slip of paper and pasted over 'Virtue, truth and innocence' (II.iii). Frasi's recitative 'O King of Kings' is printed, but on M C/261 f. 9v, it has clearly been crossed out. I suggest this was omitted in 1757, although it would have resulted in an odd modulation from 'Watchful angels' in E flat to the anthem *My heart is inditing* a semitone below. Beard sang Assuerus, using the music he had performed before in 1736 and 1740. The 1751 music inserted for Lowe and Frasi after 'Tune your harps' was cut, and so was 'Hope, a pure and lasting treasure'.

After Assuerus' 'How can I stay when love invites', Esther was given a new recitative 'The Lord his people shall restore' (using a text from the Cannons version of 'The Lord our enemy has slain'), and this was followed by the new duet 'Sion now shall raise her head'. Of all the music new to *Esther* in 1757, this duet and chorus is generally considered by Handel scholars to be the only insertion that the blind Handel actually composed via dictation to Smith.<sup>589</sup> Anthony Hicks described that it 'is thoroughly Handelian in its magisterially sustained development of simple material. Of all the late oratorio additions, it alone is plainly in the main stream of Handel's mature work.'<sup>590</sup> The 1751 insertion 'Virtue, truth, and innocence' was supplanted by 'May thy beauty', an English version of 'Tua bellezza', the Italian insertion that Conti sang at the same position in 1737.<sup>591</sup>

Act III featured two more new recitatives and songs: 'Permit me, Queen ... How sweet the rose' for Beralta's Israelite Woman, and 'By thee, great Prince ... This glorious deed' for Esther. Anthony Hicks doubted that these two new arias were dictated to Smith by Handel, and commented that their music 'hardly suggests late Handel. Both are lightweight pieces scored for violin and continuo only ... the reversion to an airy, not to say

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<sup>589</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 90.

<sup>590</sup> Op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>591</sup> Dean was incorrect that this was simply an altered text for Mordecai's 1732 aria 'So much beauty' (Op. cit., p. 213).

trite, style is surprising.’<sup>592</sup> Dean believed that these arias were both new words ‘dubbed on old music’,<sup>593</sup> but this is not supported by evidence. Smith’s instructions on M C/261 f. 115v-116r imply that the duet ‘I’ll proclaim the wond’rous story’ could have been shared between three sopranos. The librettos all indicate that Esther and Mordecai performed the duet, but the musical sources are ambiguous: Frasi is named for the first verse (as in 1751), Passerini is named for the second, and Isabella Young is named during the duet section.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Op. cit., p. 154. Hicks also evaluated ‘To conclude that Smith ‘composed’ many of the late additions would obviously stretch the evidence too far: we do not know ... how much was genuinely ‘dictated’ either verbally or by illustration at the harpsichord. But there is enough to indicate that Smith’s role was likely to have been more creative than has hitherto been recognized.’ (p. 169).

<sup>593</sup> Op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>594</sup> Appendix 4a, footnote 100.



## Chapter 5 *Deborah* (HWV 51)

### Part One: The Creation of Handel's *Deborah*

#### The 'compilation' process

*Deborah* was Handel's second English oratorio, but his first attempt to create one solely for his public audience. During the last fifty years there has scarcely been a programme note, article or discussion devoted to it that does not argue against Winton Dean's verdict:<sup>595</sup>

*Deborah* is a failure. The subject was an unhappy choice; it was poorly handled by the librettist; Handel was not yet at ease with the new form to which he had unwittingly given birth; ... His manifest purpose was to exploit the popularity of *Esther*; having by chance laid his finger on the pulse of his audience, he sought no more than to keep it there.<sup>596</sup>

Dean claimed that Handel 'put little effort into the music, which is largely a pasticcio.'<sup>597</sup>

This sentence contains two assumptions that can be challenged. Firstly, Handel's choice of methods for preparing *Deborah* might not have saved him time, trouble or effort.

Moreover, these methods could be interpreted as efficiency rather than weakness.

Secondly, we can speculate that the term 'pasticcio' does not deserve Dean's negative connotations. Curtis Price defines the label as a description of 'An opera made up of various pieces from different composers or sources and adapted to a new or existing libretto'.<sup>598</sup> The use of the Italian word for 'pastry' was used to describe operas patched together, as if the result was a pie made of leftovers or whatever ingredients where

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<sup>595</sup> The group of writers and performers who might be described as *Deborah* apologists are best represented by the late Howard Serwer, whose articles '*Deborah* is a Failure...' (1983 Maryland Handel Festival) and 'In Praise of *Deborah*' (*American Choral Review*, April-July 1985, pp. 14-9) both adopt a post-Dean revisionist stance.

<sup>596</sup> *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, Oxford, 1959, p. 225.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>598</sup> 'Pasticcio' in *NG Opera*.

available at that particular moment. As discussed in Chapter 1, Handel regularly produced pasticcios using music by other composers during the Second Academy period. During the 1730s he also compiled 'self-pasticcios' using his own material: *Oreste*, *Alessandro Severo* and *Giove in Argo*. Handel's methods used for such works do not differ substantially from those used to prepare the 'legitimate' opera *Rinaldo* or *Deborah*, although these two major works are never formally classified as pasticcios. Perhaps there is a distinction owing to Handel's creation of some new music for both examples cited above, although that factor is not enough to preserve *Parnasso in Festa* from the obscurity enforced upon it by the stigma attached by the 'pasticcio' label.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to defend *Deborah* from Winton Dean's judgement, which needs to be read in its original context, and which includes plenty of praise of certain musical qualities in the score. Handel's composition of *Deborah* is undeniably peculiar among his theatre works: a substantial amount of the autograph manuscript is written by Smith and S1, with two-thirds of the music reworked from previous compositions.<sup>599</sup> The deep-rooted attitude that pasticcios do not deserve a place alongside Handel's corpus of original works is unsupportable, and Dean's implication that pasticcio method is artistically less valuable because it requires less effort than new composition, or that it is inherently less dramatically satisfying, ought not to continue to be upheld in modern Handel studies until an objective and thorough study of the pasticcios is undertaken.

We cannot discount the possibility that Handel took genuine care over the selection of music to be adapted for *Deborah*, but the appearance of the autograph manuscript and the uneven artistic result of this quasi-pasticcio process supports speculation that Handel's attention lay elsewhere, perhaps on the day-to-day management and performance schedule of the King's Theatre opera company. The autograph of *Deborah* was completed, signed and dated on 21 February 1733, the day after Handel had finished directing the first run of

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<sup>599</sup> For a detailed description of the autograph manuscript of *Deborah*, see Burrows & Ronish: *A Catalogue of Handel's Musical Autographs*, p. 204.



his new opera *Orlando*. Appendix 1a Figure 4 reveals Handel's busy performance schedule during the period in which he was creating *Deborah*. Given the pressure of his commitments, and his lack of a developed precedent system for the composition of new English oratorios, it is not surprising that Handel preferred a solution that would avoid his having to spend a few weeks intensively composing a new major work.

However, the method employed for the composition of *Deborah* suggests that Handel's choice of music was carefully made, contradicting potential exaggeration that the oratorio was prepared in haste. Burrows evaluated that 'A quite close collaboration between librettist and composer may be assumed. The score contains much self-borrowed music from earlier works, and Humphreys may well have moulded his choice of verse-forms to the metres of the music that Handel intended to re-use.'<sup>600</sup> For this method to work effectively, Handel must have spent a reasonable amount of time considering which of his old works to recycle: his choices were presumably given to Samuel Humphreys early enough to allow the librettist to supply an adequate new text, and then Handel probably set to work adapting old music and composing new material.

It is possible that this initial process was done in stages, perhaps with Handel working on the music for Part 1 while Humphreys was preparing texts for Parts 2 and 3. Yet it is apparent that the process was neither quick nor simple, which makes me doubt that Handel decided to borrow music merely to save time. On the contrary, the extent of alterations required for the borrowed music confirms that the creation of *Deborah* caused Handel some trouble. Burrows commented that 'many of the borrowed numbers in *Deborah* were largely recomposed to fit their new situations ... in the end, he hardly saved himself much work by self-borrowing, but the arrangement probably enabled him to work at the score in odd moments, as gaps in his other commitments allowed.' It may be significant that Handel never used this method for composing another dramatic oratorio:<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>600</sup> Handel, Oxford, 1994, p. 234.

<sup>601</sup> *Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (1737) is a revised version of an older work, and *The Occasional Oratorio* (1746) is not a dramatic oratorio.

perhaps the extensive revision process supplanting the conventional compositional process during the initial creative stage caused Handel an unforeseen amount of trouble, and after 1733 he probably decided it was better to compose new oratorios rather than to attempt to shape them from pre-existing movements.<sup>602</sup>

### The first performances of *Deborah*

On 12 March 1733, an advertisement in the *Daily Journal* announced:

*By His Majesty's Command. At the King's Theatre ... will be performed, DEBORAH, an Oratorio, or Sacred Drama, In English Composed by Mr. Handel. And to be performed by a great Number of the best Voices and Instruments. N.B. This is the last Dramatick Performance that will be exhibited at the King's Theatre till after Easter. The House to be fitted up and illuminated in a new and particular Manner.*<sup>603</sup>

The person responsible for the advertisement - presumably Handel - clearly made an effort to emphasize that *Deborah* was special and different from the usual operatic fare at the King's Theatre,<sup>604</sup> and that the lack of staging was somehow compensated for by an ambitious visual element that seems to have involved both decor and lighting. Regrettably, more specific information about how the auditorium was 'to be fitted up and illuminated in a new and particular Manner' is unknown. The author of the advertisement was also keen to draw attention to the unprecedented large scale of the performance, featuring a 'great Number of the best Voices and Instruments.' The advertisement's reference to *Deborah* being the last production at the theatre before it closed for Easter confirms that Handel

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<sup>602</sup> Alternatively, it is possible that Handel's extensive self-borrowing in *Esther* and *Deborah* exhausted the potential sources, which prevented the formula from being repeated for future oratorios. *Athalia* features a few self-borrowings, but much fewer than *Deborah* and *Esther*.

<sup>603</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 308.

<sup>604</sup> The difference between oratorio and opera was not yet widely understood. For example, the *Daily Journal* of 2 April 1733 reported that 'On Saturday Night last the King, Queen, Prince, and the three eldest Princesses ... saw the Opera called Deborah.' (*Deutsch*, p. 310).



deliberately organised the first performance of *Deborah* to coincide with the Lenten season.<sup>605</sup>

Shortly afterwards, the *Daily Advertiser* reported on the 20 March 1733 that ‘Signor Senosini, Signora Strada, Signora Gismundi, Signora Bertoldi, Signor Montagnana, Miss Young, Miss Arne, Mrs Wright, and Mr Swartzs, perform’d the principal Parts’.<sup>606</sup> The participation of Young, Arne, and Wright has not been previously identified in Handel literature, and it is difficult to speculate what their contributions might have been. They might have primarily contributed as chorus singers. It is possible that the report is inaccurate, or that the three ladies made only a minimal contribution. My listing of the cast in Appendices 5a and 5b is based on participants confirmed by the evidence in the conducting score (M C/258). ‘Mr Swartzs’ might be a misspelled reference to Gustavus Waltz.

As the *Daily Journal* advertisement had implied, the performing forces were unusually large. Viscount Percival wrote in his diary on 27 March 1733 that ‘It was very magnificent, near a hundred performers, among whom about twenty-five singers’.<sup>607</sup> Lady A. Irwin wrote a fascinating report:

Last week we had an Oratorio, composed by Hendel out of the story of Barak and Deborah, the latter of which name[s] it bears. Hendel thought, encouraged by the Princess Royal, it had merit enough to deserve a guinea, and the first it was performed at that price, exclusive of subscriber’s tickets, there was but a 120 people in the House. The subscribers being refused unless they would pay a guinea, they, insisting upon the right of their silver tickets, forced into the House, and carried their point ... I was at this entertainment on Tuesday; ‘tis excessive noisy, a

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<sup>605</sup> 17 March 1733 was the eve of Palm Sunday (Burrows: Op. cit., p. 173).

<sup>606</sup> Reprinted in *The London Stage*, Season 1732-1733, p. 279.

<sup>607</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 309.

vast number of instruments and voices, who all perform at a time, and is in music what I fancy a French ordinary in conversation.<sup>608</sup>

The size and constitution of Handel's opera orchestra was consistently similar throughout his career, and numbered about 35 musicians.<sup>609</sup> Handel evidently attempted something more elaborate with *Deborah*, no doubt as another part of his attempt to increase its box office appeal as a spectacular entertainment. If we trust that the Viscount Percival's diary entry gives a reliable description, the estimate of twenty-five singers presumably included the soloists, who would have sung with the choir in choruses. This implies that there were approximately seventy-five players in the orchestra, which would mean that Handel expected *Deborah* to be played by an orchestra that was double its usual size. It is little wonder that Lady Irwin found it noteworthy that 'a vast number of instruments and voices' performed together at the same time with excessively noisy results. Winton Dean observed that 'we can gauge something of its proportions by glancing at the layout of the opening eight-part chorus', and suggested that the scale of Handel's performance influenced him to make unusually careful and detailed directions for the orchestra. The score of *Deborah* is remarkably full of special effects, such as the controlled use of organ in some arias and meticulous indications of continuo. Dean considered that Handel's orchestral directions were made to avoid the risk of a bass-heavy texture from a huge orchestra in which 'so many instruments shared the bass stave'.<sup>610</sup>

Regardless of the haphazard creative process producing an uneven score, it seems that Handel and Humphreys deliberately set out to produce a 'Sacred Drama' that would be recognized as something unique and spectacular in its presentation, and that it would build

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<sup>608</sup> Letter to Lord Carlisle, dated 31 March 1733, *Deutsch* pp. 309-10.

<sup>609</sup> This is established by eyewitness descriptions by Pierre-Jacques Fougereux (a French visitor to London who attended Handel's operas *Tolomeo*, *Siroe*, and *Admeto* during the Royal Academy of Music's final season in 1727-8; see 'A London opera-goer in 1728', Appendix E in Burrows: *Handel*) and Sir John Clerk (whose 1733 diary entry is quoted in *Handel: A Celebration of his Life and Times*, p. 145). Both reports correspond with the Royal Academy of Music's proposals for its orchestral forces in 1720 (Milhous & Hume: 'New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music in 1720' in *Theatre Journal* 35 (1983), pp. 158-6).

<sup>610</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 235.



on the success of *Esther* the previous year while visibly being performed on a much more ambitious scale. Three days after the first performance, the *Daily Advertiser* enthusiastically reported that *Deborah* was:

An Entertainment, perhaps, the most magnificent that has ever been exhibited on an English Theatre ... The Composition of the Musick is by no means inferior to the most finish'd of that Gentleman's Works; but the Disposition of the Performers was in a Taste beyond what has been attempted. There was a very great Number of Instruments by the best Hands, and such as would properly accompany three Organs. The Pit and Orchestre were cover'd as at an Assembly, and the whole House illuminated in a new and most beautiful manner.<sup>611</sup>

The London newspapers during this period of history did not often pass such detailed critical comment on musical performances, and this report has never been included in any Handel literature to my knowledge. It confirms that the orchestra was notably bigger than usual, and gives another tantalizing hint that the theatre was decorated or lit in a particularly imaginative and new way. This visual element of Handel's oratorio has not hitherto been suspected, yet it seems evident that the production was planned to feature lighting and a physical layout of performers 'in a Taste beyond what has been attempted'. We can only speculate that both features could have supported dramatic presentation in an imaginative style, perhaps an eighteenth-century equivalent of the modern concept of semi-staged operas in concert. The style of oratorio presentation designed for *Esther* the previous year had provoked the satirical description of Handel, Strada, Senesino and Bertolli sitting in a pulpit.<sup>612</sup> Perhaps this motivated Handel or a collaborator to devise a radical change in the presentation of *Deborah*. This ought not be inflated and misconstrued as evidence of Handel producing a staged oratorio, but the newspapers give a frustratingly

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<sup>611</sup> Reprinted in *The London Stage*, p. 279. I am grateful to Donald Burrows for bringing this specific entry in *The London Stage* to my attention.

<sup>612</sup> 'See and Seem Blind', *Deutsch*, pp. 300-1.

limited glimpse of Handel attempting to give some sort of performance that could be legitimately described as the most magnificent Entertainment 'that has ever been exhibited on an English Theatre' from both musical and visual perspectives.

Sensible discussion of the oratorio's artistic reception at the time was prevented by scandal that brought both the opera house and House of Commons under attack. Handel's attempt to double ticket prices for the first performance met with protests from subscribers, who refused to pay a guinea for the concert and forced their entry into the theatre. Despite Lady Irwin's gossip, it is difficult to place much credibility in the notion that Handel decided to double ticket prices and charge subscribers only because the Princess Royal encouraged him to. It seems extraordinary that Handel might have done this on a whim, especially when the unpopularity of the decision must have been foreseeable without some credible argument in its favour. Perhaps Handel or Heidegger considered that the oratorio was outside the scope of the normal opera house season because of its performance in Lent. If the project had not been budgeted for as part of the opera season, or if it was particularly expensive to illuminate the house, engage a choir and hire the equivalent of an extra opera orchestra, it seems reasonable to assume that the considerable expense of producing the performance demanded higher ticket prices for simple practical reasons such as covering costs.<sup>613</sup> Satirists and subscribers might not have been conscious of the opera company's anxious financial management, but Handel must have been fully aware of it: the raised prices for *Deborah* must have been an attempt to use a lucrative and novel attraction to remedy the company's struggle to break even.

However, those unsympathetic to Handel, or unaware of the financial difficulties of running a theatre, would have been attracted to criticisms of the composer's alleged personal greed. A satirical epigram in *The Bee* of 24 March 1733 compared Handel's

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<sup>613</sup> An analysis of financial information about the 1732-3 King's Theatre season by Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume concluded that 'At the most optimistic estimates, this company might barely have broken even on its actual expenses in 1732-3 - with an unpaid artistic director, no rent paid for Heidegger's theatre building, and gratis use of stock scenery and costumes.' ('Handel's Opera Finances in 1732-3' in *MT*, February 1984, p. 89).



failure to double his ticket prices for the opening night of *Deborah* with Walpole's ill-fated introduction of an Excise Bill taxing tobacco, wines, and spirits in the House of Commons on 14 March.<sup>614</sup> It was not the intention of the satirist to make any direct comment upon the artistic or musical quality of Handel's performance, and his main interest was probably political. Yet displeasure with Handel must have been real for some offended subscribers, and Deutsch commented that 'The fact that the first night prices of *Deborah* were unpleasantly high was sufficient to bracket Handel's and Walpole's greediness as one attack against the public interest.'

The apparent fiasco surrounding the first performance of *Deborah* was also referred to in a letter published in *The Craftsman* on 7 April 1733, which attacked Handel's 'tyrannical attitude to his artists' and claimed that Handel thought:

that the late Decay of *Opera's* was owing to their *Cheapness*, and to the great *Frauds* committed by the *Doorkeepers*; that the annual Subscribers were a Parcel of *Rogues*, and made an ill Use of their Tickets, by often *running* two into the Gallery, that to obviate these Abuses he had contrived a Thing, that was better than an *Opera*, call'd an *Oratorio*; to which none should be admitted, but by *printed* Permits, or Tickets of one Guinea each ... and lastly, that as the very being of *Opera's* depended on *Him singly*, it was just that the Profit arising from hence should be for his *own Benefit* ... The Absurdity, Extravagancy, and Opposition of this *Scheme* disgusted the whole Town. Many of the most constant Attenders of the *Opera's* resolved absolutely to renounce them, rather than go to them under such Exortion and Vexation ... the *Projector* had the Mortification to see but a very thin audience in his *Oratorio*; and of about two hundred and sixty odd, that it consisted of, it was notorious that not ten paid for their *Permits*.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> The epigram 'A Dialogue between two Projectors' is reprinted in Deutsch, p. 309.

<sup>615</sup> Signed by P—lo R—li (Deutsch, pp. 310-2).

The author is cited as P—lo R—li, but it is uncertain that Paolo Rolli wrote this letter: although he might have agreed with much of it and his private correspondence contains plenty of such vitriolic satire, it would have been unusual for Rolli to make such a public attack on Handel, and the letter contains several comments that are blatantly written by a nationalistic Briton rather than an Italian resident in London. The letter includes the Epigram that had first appeared in *The Bee* a fortnight earlier and similarly uses Handel and the opera company as an allegorical attack at Walpole's government, so it is difficult to discern how precisely the letter was intended to report what really happened at the first performance of *Deborah*: the comment that the first audience numbered 260 contradicts Lady Irwin's more conservative estimate of 120 but it is impossible to discern which report is inaccurate. It seems probable that the facts about Handel's performance and his management of the opera company were loosely treated in *The Craftsman* in order to stretch far enough to be used as a more precise allegory for Walpole and his Excise Bill.

Scathing criticisms of Handel must have found support among a discontented circle of people who would soon become supporters of the Opera of the Nobility, which was founded only a few weeks later. Dean observed that if Rolli was the author, he might have been motivated to encourage divisions within Handel's company and to sow seeds of public discontent with Handel,<sup>616</sup> with criticisms such as:

No Voices, no *Instruments* were admitted; but such as flatter'd his Ears, though they shock'd those of the Audience. *Wretched Scrapers* were put above the *best Hands* in the *Orchestre*. No Musick but *his own* was to be allowed, though every Body was weary of it; and he had the Impudence to assert, *that there was no Composer in England but Himself*. Even *Kings* and *Queens* were to be content with whatever low Characters he was pleased to assign them, as it was evident in the case of Signior *Montagnana*; who, though a *King*, is always obliged to act (except an angry, rumbling Song, or two) the most insignificant Part of the whole Drama.

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<sup>616</sup> Op. cit., p. 237.



This may also be a veiled attack on Walpole's attitude towards the King, his choice of ministers, and his style of government. The allegory might have had some resonance for disgruntled people looking for an opportunity to oppose Handel. Ruth Smith commented that the allegory 'was completely transparent (and still is to historians), in that substantial parts of its narrative repeat well-rehearsed critical versions of Walpole's conduct, even using his own words, and are quite inapplicable to Handel. But the slight pretence is gleefully ornamented with detailed ramifications'.<sup>617</sup>

None of the satirical reports mention the music of *Deborah* in any detail, and, aside from the Walpole allegories, appear to be principally concerned with opera house politics rather than artistic issues. The *Craftsman* article confirms that there was a smaller audience at the first performance of *Deborah* than Handel would have hoped for, even if the respectable total of six performances suggests that the oratorio was received with some enthusiasm. On 7 July 1733, during Handel's visit to Oxford, the poem *Musica Sacra Dramatica, Sive Oratorium* was read by Henry Baynbrigg Buckeridge at the Sheldonian Theatre.<sup>618</sup> The poem was evidently in honour of Handel, and contains several specific references in praise of *Deborah*, although it had not yet been performed at Oxford. However, the poem is an indication of the excitement and curiosity that this early oratorio generated among Handel's supporters.

*Deborah* was revived in five different later seasons between 1734 and 1756, and Handel supervised a total of eighteen performances. Dean observed that '*Deborah* never won wide acclaim, except perhaps from the opera audiences of 1733-5, and there is no record of favourite songs being sung at concerts', but noted that it 'was always a favourite of Mrs Delany's'.<sup>619</sup> Some arias were evidently rated highly enough for an interest to be taken in ordering manuscript copies: the Earl of Shaftesbury asked James Harris to supply

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<sup>617</sup> *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, p. 203. Smith also observed that 'After this Handel did not risk launching a new oratorio in London for nearly six years'.

<sup>618</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 320-2.

<sup>619</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 237.

Lord Gainsborough with a copy of Abinoam's aria 'Tears such as tender fathers shed' in 1736.<sup>620</sup>

### Aspects of the libretto of Handel's *Deborah*

Dean suggested that Handel chose the story of Deborah for an oratorio because Maurice Greene had recently composed part of the 'Song of *Deborah* and *Barak*'.<sup>621</sup> It is equally plausible that Samuel Humphreys might have been more closely involved in the choice of subject: Ruth Smith convincingly argued that an early eighteenth-century librettist would have regarded the story as ripe for dramatization, and observed that Humphreys 'praised the Song of Deborah in his commentary on the Bible as far surpassing any classical attempts at sublime and affective poetry'.<sup>622</sup>

According to Chapter 4 of the Book of Judges, the Israelites have worshipped false gods, and the Lord has allowed them to be conquered by the superior military power of the Canaanites, ruled by King Jabin. Sisera is the captain of the Canaanite army and has nine hundred chariots of iron, and has 'mightily oppressed the children of Israel' for twenty years. Deborah, the chief judge of the Israelites,<sup>623</sup> instructs Barak the son of Abinoam to take ten thousand men toward Mount Tabor, and prophesies that Sisera will be delivered into his hands. Barak responds that he will only go if Deborah goes too. Deborah responds that she will go, particularly because she prophesies that 'the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman'. Heber the Kenite informs Sisera that Barak has gone to Mount Tabor, and Sisera gathers together his army. Judges 4: 15-21 narrates that:

the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away

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<sup>620</sup> Letter dated 22 April 1736 (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 15). The aria was omitted from Walsh's published collection of arias from the oratorio.

<sup>621</sup> Op. cit., p. 226. The libretto of Greene's composition was advertised in *The Gentleman's Magazine* for October 1732. Dean considered that 'Greene's *Deborah*, words and music together, is a better work than Handel's.' (Ibid., p. 228).

<sup>622</sup> Op. cit., p. 118. Smith noted that Humphreys' admiration of the Song of Deborah 'fills four and a half folio pages, a lot even by the standards of eighteenth-century biblical commentary.' (see Bibliography for full reference to Humphreys' commentary).

<sup>623</sup> The Israelites did not have a monarchy until Saul was chosen by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 9-10).



on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host ... and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left. Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for *there was* peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle. And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him. Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No. Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

Judges 5 contains the 'Song of Deborah and Barak', in which the two Israelite ringleaders sing 'Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel ... I will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.'<sup>624</sup> Despite Humphreys' admiration of its poetry, he uses only a little of its text in his own libretto. Some valuable details from the Old Testament are omitted from the libretto. Humphreys avoided mentioning Jael's husband Heber the Kenite, so does not explain that Sisera trusts Jael as an ally. Perhaps the removal of this detail makes Jael's actions seem untarnished by treachery. Sisera's persecution of the Israelites and his initial military advantage is not explored, nor is the Israelites recent lapse into idolatry which is rectified by Deborah's prophesy that the true God will ensure Barak's victory. Barak's refusal to go to war unless Deborah goes with him is contradicted by his eagerness for it in the oratorio, and it is difficult to imagine that his apparent

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<sup>624</sup> Judges 5: 2-3 (the entire 'song' runs for thirty verses).

petulance and reluctance in the biblical source would have suited Senesino's customary heroic role.

Dean suggested that 'The Bible account has some details that would have suited Handel, in particular the ironical account of Sisera's mother waiting for his return and ascribing the delay to the size of his booty. Deborah's portrait might have been softened by the introduction of her husband or even a mention of his existence. But Humphreys gives the whole story a dead level of insipidity'.<sup>625</sup> Dean commented that 'The prime sources of Handel's inspiration in his oratorio texts were a great central theme and the clash of human personality, the one illustrating and arising from the other. *Deborah* provided neither; there is no moral core, and Humphreys made a mess of the drama.'<sup>626</sup>

Dean's critical objection to the libretto was also based on a personal distaste for its plot: 'It is difficult to see how the most skilful librettist could have made the story ... anything but repulsive to a modern audience. We are asked to ascribe to Jehovah's goodness a political assassination of the basest kind.'<sup>627</sup> However, such plots were common and popular during the early eighteenth-century. Howard Serwer noted that 'this event is quite similar to other biblical stories including Judith's beheading the sleeping Holofernes and carrying the severed head back to the Israelites as proof of her deed. Judith was set many times by composers of Italian oratorio, and from this we might conclude that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century audiences were not quite as fastidious as we are about political and moral niceties.'<sup>628</sup>

Dean opined that Humphreys 'seems to have had no model other than the Bible, which may account for his failure to impose any shape, internal or external, on the story.

Of all Handel's librettists, he alone was a literary hack and no more. Instead of

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<sup>625</sup> Op. cit., p. 225. It is possible that Dean misunderstood the account of Sisera's mother. It is part of the conclusion to the Song of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5: 28-30, and it is a mocking description by the Israelites. It would have not made an ideal dramatic scene out of context or without some earlier introduction for the character, and Sisera's mother is not a real character in Judges 4.

<sup>626</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>628</sup> Serwer: 'In Praise of Handel's *Deborah*', p. 15. Serwer added that 'In all fairness ... it must be pointed out that the Book of Judith, a much longer text than Book 4 of Judges, builds to a horrible climax by degrees and is dramatically superior to the story of Deborah.'



concentrating on the narrative and the human detail, he pours forth streams of faint religious verbiage, and with all the more profusion when it is least required.’<sup>629</sup> An examination of the first edition printed libretto of *Deborah* reveals that profuse verbiage is abundant in Humphreys’ dedication of the oratorio to Queen Caroline.

It may be a mistake to deny the possibility that Humphreys, like Handel, was expressing genuine admiration for the Queen. The sentiment that ‘the polite Arts are favour’d by Your Majesty’ was true enough, but the paragraph ‘Could I hope, MADAM, to improve my inconsiderable Talent in Poetry to that Perfection, as would enable me to paint the shining Character of Your Majesty in a just Light, I should be indefatigable in cultivating my Propensity to the *Muses*’ is an excellent example of Humphreys’ ‘flowery, not to say grovelling style’.<sup>630</sup> Humphreys’ comparison between Deborah and Queen Caroline is notable for its conventional (and thus probably fake) modesty and its sycophantic flattery:

Had I been able, MADAM, to have represented *Deborah*, acting for the Happiness of her People, with half of the Lustre that diffuses itself around Your *Majesty’s* Conduct, I might then have congratulated my self for drawing so excellent a Portraiture; but if a much greater Master had employed his Abilities on this Occasion, he would have been sensible, like my self, by the Event, that he had only shewn how much the *Jewish* Heroine is transcended by BRITANNIA’s QUEEN.

Humphreys’ comparison of contemporary monarch and biblical prophetess could invite attempts to interpret the libretto as a political allegory. Burrows commented that it would be ‘misguided if we try to make too much of a connection between Humphreys’ portrayal of Deborah and his dedication of the libretto to the Queen’.<sup>631</sup> Such a flimsy allegory lacks the sufficient detail to have been deliberately intended by either librettist or composer.

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<sup>629</sup> Op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>630</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>631</sup> Op. cit., p. 235.

Handel seems not to have shared Winton Dean's low regard of Samuel Humphreys, and the poet had also provided English translations of operas for several printed librettos.<sup>632</sup> It is not known in what esteem Humphreys was held by contemporary writers. Dean's sharp criticism may not be without historical precedent: Henry Fielding added an afterpiece to his play *The Miser* entitled *Deborah, or, A Wife for You All*, in April 1733. Deutsch and Dean both assume that this was a burlesque ridiculing Humphreys' libretto, but Fielding's afterpiece was possibly never published and is now lost.<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> *Poro* (1731), *Rinaldo* (1731), *Ezio* (1732), *Sosarme* (1732), *Orlando* (1733), and perhaps *Arianna in Creta* (1734).

<sup>633</sup> Deutsch, p. 310.



## Part Two: Description of the Eight Versions of *Deborah*

### Sources

Handel's autograph score (R.M.20.h.2) is an unusual manuscript. Many sections including borrowed music are written out by two copyists, Smith and S1, presumably following Handel's instructions,<sup>634</sup> and this procedure might be interpreted either as evidence of an efficient compilation process or as a makeshift mess. The conducting score (M C/258) was written by Smith, and also contains annotations, instructions, and alterations in Handel's handwriting.<sup>635</sup> The manuscript remained in use after Handel's death in 1759, and contains material inserted for John Christopher Smith jr's revivals in March 1764, February 1766, March 1767 and March 1771.<sup>636</sup> Many pages of the original 1733 performing score were removed in order to accommodate Smith jr's insertions, which means that numerous details regarding Handel's performances are lost. The posthumous insertions frequently misled Chrysander, whose edition remains the only version of the full score yet published.

A copy of the printed libretto in the Mann Collection (King's College library, Cambridge, Mn.20.47) is the only clean copy dated 1733 preserved without cuts. Copies in the Royal College of Music (XX.G.21) and Gerald Coke Handel Collection (Lfon 1830) are identical to the Mann copy, apart from the insertion of a printed leaf listing cuts made in performances. It is implausible that these seventy-nine lines of cut texts relate to the first run of performances (1733a), but the details match Handel's revisions for Oxford in 1733b (as indicated in M C/258). No extant copy of an Oxford libretto of *Deborah* has ever been identified, and it seems very unlikely that a new print run of *Deborah* was deemed necessary only three months after it had been published for the first London performances. It appears that a printed leaf listing cuts was printed and inserted into re-used stock for

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<sup>634</sup> For information about this see Burrows and Ronish: Op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>635</sup> See Clausen: Op. cit., pp. 128-33.

<sup>636</sup> Performance dates of Smith jr's revivals of *Deborah* taken from Eva Zöllner: *English Oratorio after Handel: The London Oratorio Series and its Repertory, 1760-1800*, Appendix A.

Oxford.<sup>637</sup> A copy of the 1733 libretto in New York Public Library (Berg Collection 75-874) proves that old stock of 1733a librettos was also used in 1734, on which occasion a printed slip stating ‘ADVERTISEMENT. ALL those Lines mark’d down the Side with a Pencil, are left out in the Performance’ worked in conjunction with an inserted leaf titled ‘ALTERATIONS sung in Italian’.<sup>638</sup> The same method of altering old printed librettos for revivals might have been used in 1735. No libretto was printed for the aborted 1737 version, which suggests that Handel’s idea to revive the oratorio was abandoned at an early stage.

Two different editions dated 1744 have survived. The most expansive version (‘1744a’), contained in a unique copy in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection (Lfon 1831), was prepared for Handel’s performance on 3 November. Copies of an amended slightly shorter version (‘1744b’) in the National Library of Scotland (BH.Lib.75a), the Newman Flower Collection (B.R. 310.I Hd674), and the Schoelcher Collection (Rés. V. S. 823) were probably prepared for the second performance three weeks later.<sup>639</sup> Old unused copies of the 1744b libretto were adapted for re-use in 1754 (as is shown in the unique copy in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection, Lfon 1832).<sup>640</sup> There are two different issues of the libretto dated 1756, although there was only one performance; identical copies in the Royal College of Music (XX.G.21) and in the Schoelcher Collection (Rés. V. S. 824) reflect Handel’s last performing version of the oratorio, but the unique copy in the Cambridge University Library (MR460.c.75) is incorrectly dated and relates to a revival by Smith jr after Handel’s death.

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<sup>637</sup> Dean suggested that other 1733 librettos featuring cuts indicated by pencil lines in the margin were the second issue, and that the version with the inserted printed leaf was the third issue (Op. cit., p. 242). It was certainly the other way around.

<sup>638</sup> Another copy in the British Library (11775.g.19) has the advertisement about cuts and the pencil lines in the margin but now lacks the Italian alterations leaf. A copy of the 1744b libretto has the Italian alterations leaf, but this has been inserted here in error.

<sup>639</sup> In all three 1744b copies, Jael’s air ‘All his mercies’ is (or has been) pasted over. The Italian alterations leaf (1734) is bound in the Schoelcher copy by mistake (see discussion of 1734 version below).

<sup>640</sup> Blank paper or alternative texts were pasted over several texts: ‘For ever to the voice of prayer’ (blank); ‘Despair all around them’ (replaced with a recitative with the same text for Deborah, but retaining a cue for ‘Hallelujah’); ‘All your boast shall end in woe’ (pasted over by Sisera’s aria ‘Hence I hasten’); Jael’s aria ‘O the Pleasure’; Deborah’s recitative ‘Barak, we now to battle go’ (blank); the Israelite Woman’s aria ‘Now sweetly smiling Peace’ (pasted over by Deborah’s aria ‘The glorious Sun’); The Israelite woman’s aria ‘Our Fears are now for ever fled’ (blank).



## The 1733a London Version

Appendix 5a is a tabular reconstruction of all Handel's performing versions of *Deborah* for which sufficient evidence has been discovered. Appendix 5b presents the complete content of all known printed librettos that correspond to Handel's own performances. There are 38 distinct musical numbers, including two accompanied recitatives, in the 1733a version of *Deborah*, which can be divided into newly composed music and recycled pieces (either entirely lifted or partly based on old works):

Type:	Total:	
New music	12	-
Borrowed or adapted from old music	26	11 different sources: <sup>641</sup> 2 coronation anthems (1727); 4 Chandos anthems (1716-8); German oratorio (1716?); English Ode (1713); Italian serenata (1708); Latin Psalm (1707); Italian oratorio (1707)

Less than a third of this version of *Deborah* is entirely original new composition, an unusually low proportion even for the frequent recycler Handel. The choice of where to provide new music seems to have been relatively arbitrary, although it is probably not coincidental that most of Barak's role was freshly composed for Senesino. Handel's new music included:

- Barak & Deborah's duet 'Where would thy ardours raise me'
- Deborah's accompanied recitative 'By that adorable decree'
- Chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer'
- Barak's 'How lovely is the blooming fair'
- Sisera's 'At my feet extended low'
- Barak's 'In the battle fame pursuing'
- Deborah and Barak's duet 'Smiling freedom, lovely guest'
- Chorus 'Now the proud insulting foe'
- Chorus 'Doleful tidings'
- Jael's 'Tyrant, now no more we dread thee'

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<sup>641</sup> This statistic only includes the most recent or obvious source of thematic material. As Appendix 5a shows, some musical ideas were used many times before Handel adapted them for *Deborah*. This distinction perhaps explains why my suggestion for the total number of sources is one less than Dean's (Op. cit., p. 230).

- Deborah's 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed'
- Barak's 'Low at her feet he bow'd'
- Deborah's accompanied recitative 'O great Jehovah!'

It is particularly unusual that Handel seems not to have composed an overture for *Deborah*. Although it is possible that an overture was composed and is now lost, this seems highly unlikely.<sup>642</sup> Serwer suggested that 'Because the source situation for the overture is so dubious, perhaps ... The twenty-three-measure ritornello leading to the chorus that opens the work can serve very well for the purpose'.<sup>643</sup> There is no evidence that an overture was performed in *Deborah* during the 1730s. I suspect that Serwer's practical solution for modern performers reflects what Handel did in his own performances until 1744.

Of the twenty-five self-borrowings in the 1733a score, about half of them have 'scarcely a note altered'.<sup>644</sup> However, some numbers show signs of considerable reworking to make the music fit its new context more appropriately. The Chandos Anthem *O praise the Lord with one consent* was reworked for the opening chorus 'Immortal Lord'. Although Handel's reasons for making the chorus grander, more spectacular and dramatic can be partly explained by the expanded forces available and the new theatrical context, it is possible that Handel redesigned the chorus to supplant a conventional overture. Serwer wrote:

The orchestra begins with a very slight variant of the tune that opens the anthem, but from that point onward, Handel has created a new piece on a far greater scale than the original, the composer using the earlier material as the springboard for a

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<sup>642</sup> The overture printed in *HG* was taken by Chrysander from Walsh's 1758 publication *Handel's Overtures ... in 8 Parts*, in which the music is credited as the overture to *Deborah*. A keyboard arrangement of this music was reprinted in Walsh's eleventh collection in 1760 (William C. Smith: *Handel: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Early Editions*, p. 297). However, this music does not survive in any authentic source of *Deborah*, and Walsh's overture appears unreliable because it post-dates the authentic insertion of a different overture in 1756.

<sup>643</sup> Op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>644</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 230.



new composition ... the whole is essentially a new creation which carefully tailors the old work to the rhetorical implications of the new text.<sup>645</sup>

Handel's copious use of movements from four Chandos anthems provides the only distinctive difference from self-borrowings in *Esther*. It seems Handel desired to closely repeat a formula which had proved successful: he inserted the two coronation anthems that had neither been performed since 1727 nor used in *Esther* in 1732, and chose good quality musical material from the *Brockes Passion*,<sup>646</sup> the Birthday Ode for Queen Anne and several numbers from Italian works - this is similar to his method in the 1732 *Esther*, except that the *Brockes Passion* borrowings in *Esther* were already part of the Cannons score. None of the music Handel chose for *Deborah* had been performed publicly in London, so it was unfamiliar to his audience, except the more recent coronation anthems that added commercial novelty to the project. Unlike *Esther*, *Deborah* has an unusually high number of choruses, and many are in five to eight parts.<sup>647</sup> Only four of the oratorio's fifteen choruses are conventionally scored for SATB chorus, which implies that Handel might have had more chorus singers than usual. The oratorio begins and ends with choruses in D major, but this is the natural key to use for trumpets and drums: it creates a musico-dramatic structure fortuitously.

### *Deborah* at Oxford, 1733b

After the end of the season, Handel gave one performance of *Deborah* at Oxford,<sup>648</sup> but there is no known copy of a libretto printed especially for the occasion. Stock left over

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<sup>645</sup> Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>646</sup> An appreciation of the different contexts of Handel's musical ideas in *Deborah* and the *Brockes Passion* is possible by comparing *HG* volumes xl and xv. For a discussion of the musical content and artistic merit of these self-borrowings, see Dean: Op. cit., pp. 231-3.

<sup>647</sup> Dean remarked that only *Samson* contains more choruses (Ibid., p. 234). There are fifteen choruses in *Deborah* (seven in Part 1, five in Part 2 and three in Part 3), compared to nine in the 1732 version of *Esther* (or ten, if we include the repeat of 'Ye sons of Israel mourn').

<sup>648</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Handel's concert series at Oxford in July 1733.

from the recently published London libretto was probably used, with an inserted printed slip listing an extensive set of cuts.

As shown in Appendix 5b, the cuts meant that Part 1 ended with simple recitative because the chorus 'Despair all around them' was omitted. However, Part 2 is almost one single long scene and it is notable that both Parts 1 and 2 are considerably shortened. Therefore it appears likely that Handel merged Parts 1 and 2 together in 1733b, thus condensing the remaining content into one long first half, and having only one interval placed after the end of 'Part 2'.<sup>649</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, Deborah's recitative 'Let him approach pacifick, or in rage; we in the cause of liberty engage' and Barak's response 'Whilst that bright motive in our bosoms glow we dread no menace, and we shun no foes' were followed directly by the chorus 'See the proud chief advances now'.

The cuts in the Coke Collection wordbook are:

- I.i Barak's recitative 'Since Heaven has thus its will express'd'  
Chorus 'For ever, to the voice of prayer'  
Deborah's Invocation ('By that adorable decree')  
Chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer'  
Two lines from Deborah's recitative 'Ye sons of Israel'  
Chorus 'O blast, with thy tremendous brow'
- I.ii Four lines of Deborah's response to Jael's recitative 'O Deborah!'
- I.v Chorus 'Despair all around them' (including the 'Hallelujah')
- I.'vii' Barak's 'Impious mortal, cease to brave us'  
Four lines cut from Deborah's recitative 'Fly, I conjure thee'  
Israelite Woman's recit. and 'Oh Judah ...No more disconsolate'
- 'II'.iii Barak's recitative 'I saw the tyrant' reduced to two lines  
Jael's recitative 'When from the battle'  
Deborah's 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed'

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<sup>649</sup> Such a decision to produce a two-part entertainment would have been unique for Handel, and contrary to normal contemporary practice and audience expectations. Even the two-part ode *Alexander's Feast* always featured an extra piece to form a middle part.



The Oxford cast would have sung the same music, at the same pitch and in the same language, as the London cast three months before. No major alterations, insertions, transpositions, or omissions were musically necessary. Instead, the fourteen cuts listed above were probably made in order to shorten the performance slightly and to alleviate pressure on presumably limited rehearsal time.<sup>650</sup> Appendix 1 Figure 5 shows Handel's schedule of performances at Oxford. After two performances of an almost complete version of *Esther* on Thursday 5 and Saturday 7 July, Handel must have concentrated upon rehearsing the new oratorio *Athalia* in time for its intended first performance on Monday 9 July. In the event, the Degree Ceremony on the 9 July overran, so the premiere of *Athalia* was delayed until the following day, and its second performance was in the evening of Wednesday 11 July, after Handel had performed *Acis & Galatea* in the morning. There was an unusually limited amount of time available to spend on preparing *Deborah* for its single performance at the Sheldonian Theatre on Thursday 12 July. The modest reduction of Barak's role might also have spared the countertenor Walter Powell's vocal chords from exhaustion. Powell could probably sing all of Senesino's music competently, but it is less likely that he could have done so by Thursday 12 July: he had sung Assuerus in *Esther* without any alteration to Senesino's part and performed the leading role of Joad in *Athalia* in addition to directing (and perhaps singing in) performances of Handel's English church music in both morning and afternoon services on Sunday 8 July. Perhaps Powell was exhausted by the end of a week full of intensive rehearsals, concerts, and conducting.

The conducting score of *Deborah* (M C/258) contains crossings-out and markings that support the fourteen cuts described in the Coke Collection wordbook, although none of them contain markings making their connection to Oxford explicit. However, M C/258 reveals some musical alterations for Oxford that cannot be gleaned from the wordbook. Pencil markings on f. 113v illustrate that the Israelite Woman's recitative 'The haughty

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<sup>650</sup> Perhaps the lack of the visual element that had apparently been a notable feature of the first London performances was also a factor.

foe' and aria 'Now sweetly smiling peace descends' were assigned to the tenor Rochetti, presumably as an Israelite Man with the vocal part transposed down an octave.<sup>651</sup> Despite an active career as a soloist based in Britain from 1724 until the 1750s, the Italian tenor Philip Rochetti is only known to have sung for Handel at Oxford in July 1733.<sup>652</sup> M C/258 confirms that the role of Sisera was sung by the countertenor 'Mr Row', and the first vocal phrase of the aria 'At my feet extended low' (f. 64a) was probably altered for Row in 1733b.<sup>653</sup> The rest of the 1733a score was performed without alteration.

### **The Italian *Deborah* (1734)**

Handel next revived *Deborah* in April 1734, when it was performed thrice and featured his current opera cast: Strada, Carestini, Scalzi, the Negri sisters and Reinhold. Dean believed that 'there is abundant evidence from Walsh's printed Songs and elsewhere' that the 1734-5 opera company sang *Deborah* in English.<sup>654</sup> Dean placed too much trust in Walsh's editions, which seldom reflect revised performance versions, and I am not aware of evidence that Carestini and Scalzi ever attempted to sing English arias in public. Dean's refusal to consider that Italian insertions in Handel's London oratorios originated in the mid-1730s now appears misplaced and renders his subsequent hypotheses severely flawed.

Dean's misunderstanding of the sources arose from two critical errors: Firstly, Dean did not examine M C/258 at first hand, and many pencil markings that give an essential understanding of Handel's performances are legible only when the actual manuscript is consulted, including several Italian cues that certainly correspond to the 1734 revival. Secondly, Dean's understanding of Handel's bilingual performances was confounded by the 1744 edition (second issue) of the *Deborah* libretto in the Schoelcher Collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Dean described that it:

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<sup>651</sup> Appendix 5a footnote 154.

<sup>652</sup> 'Rochetti' in *NG Opera*.

<sup>653</sup> Appendix 5a footnote 135.

<sup>654</sup> Op. cit., p. 239.



contains a leaflet, printed on both sides in double columns, headed 'Alterations sung in Italian'. It gives the Italian text of sixteen pieces ... and their cues. The characters involved are Barak, Sisera, and First Israelite/Israelite Woman ...

Schoelcher believed that this leaflet, which is not bound with the libretto, referred to the original production of 1733; but there is no need to suppose it misplaced. We know that Handel introduced Italian singers in *Semele* on 1 December 1744, and it seems likely that they were required at short notice for the second performance of *Deborah* on 24 November. Having already prepared an amended English libretto, he had hastily to modify this anew by means of the leaflet.<sup>655</sup>

In fact, the leaflet is definitely misplaced. Although the description of the leaflet is accurate, Dean's analysis of it is not: there is not a shred of evidence to associate the Italian texts with the 1744 revival, and, ironically, Schoelcher's intuitive hunch was much closer to the truth. Most Handel scholars and biographers have accepted Dean's interpretation without question, but it seems obvious to me that the almost entirely Italian opera cast would have needed some sort of bilingual arrangement in 1734.

Handel's policy of arranging bilingual oratorio performances in order to accommodate Carestini in 1735 has been proved beyond doubt in my discussion of *Esther* in the previous chapter.<sup>656</sup> Burrows discovered a 1733 first edition libretto of *Athalia* in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection that 'had clearly been amended for use in 1735' which contains an inserted leaf headed 'Part of SIGNOR CARESTINI in *Italian*'.<sup>657</sup> As previously discussed, this leaf contains the same Italian texts that Carestini had performed in *Esther* one month earlier. Burrows rightly assessed that the arias 'probably originated from the

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<sup>655</sup> Ibid., p. 244. Dean added that 'there is so much confusion about the text and the cast of this revival that little can be regarded as proven beyond doubt', although this disclaimer is confined to his discussion of the 1744b performance. He does not seem to have considered the potential that Handel produced bilingual performances of English oratorios before 1737.

<sup>656</sup> See also several articles by Donald Burrows: 'Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*' and 'Handel's 1738 *Oratorio*: A Benefit Pasticcio' (see Bibliography for full details).

<sup>657</sup> 'Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*', p. 203.

need to provide Carestini with a part on oratorio nights', and suggested 'it seems fairly certain that some had also been included in Handel's performances of *Deborah* in 1734'.

There is no evidence to connect Carestini's music in *Esther* (re-used in *Athalia*) with either revival of *Deborah* in which the castrato took part. However, Burrows' discovery that leftover copies of first edition librettos were adapted for revivals has a direct impact on effective analysis of the *Deborah* wordbooks. Underneath Carestini's texts on the inserted leaf in the Coke Collection wordbook of *Athalia*, there is a printed instruction: 'ADVERTISEMENT. All those Lines mark'd down the Side with a Pencil, are left out in the Performance.'<sup>658</sup> This method of indicating cuts is evident in the British Library copy of the first edition *Deborah* wordbook, although this copy does not contain an inserted leaf featuring Italian texts.

I have discovered a copy of the 1733 first edition *Deborah* wordbook in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library,<sup>659</sup> which has not been previously examined by Handel scholars. It is a significant find: it features 'Lines mark'd down the Side with a Pencil' that are an exact match of the British Library wordbook in every respect and it contains an inserted leaf headed 'ALTERATIONS sung in *Italian*'. The inserted leaf is identical to the leaflet loosely bound in the Schoelcher 1744 copy, but the typeface, design and the size of the page matches the 1735 leaf in the Coke Collection wordbook of *Athalia*. There cannot be any mistake about its intended insertion in the 1733 edition wordbook: the verso side of the leaf was once attached to the left margin of page 3 by a small blob of wax that has since become disengaged.

The Berg Collection wordbook confirms that these Italian recitatives, arias and duets were performed in *Deborah* much earlier than previously claimed, it clarifies the original function and location of the inserted leaflet in a first edition wordbook, and proves

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<sup>658</sup> See Ibid., p. 204, for a facsimile of the leaf.

<sup>659</sup> I am grateful to John Greenacombe for alerting me to the NYPL catalogue entry. I consulted various pages of the libretto faxed to me by staff at the Berg Collection, particularly the inserted leaf, but I was unable to travel to New York to inspect the wordbook first-hand: Dr. Mark Risinger confirmed my suspicion that the wax markings once joined the leaf and wordbook together and that the pencil lines are identical to the British Library copy (personal communication).



that the leaflet's association with 1744 can now be safely dismissed. The content of the leaf is reprinted in Appendix 5d. However, some detective work is still required to assign the Berg Collection wordbook a plausible date. Recent research into Handel's bilingual oratorio performances, including my own work on *Esther*, has concentrated upon the Lenten oratorio concerts in 1735 in which Carestini sang the same music in both *Esther* and *Athalia*. But it is unlikely that the bilingual version of *Deborah* contained in the Berg Collection wordbook also dates from 1735. If we compare Appendix 5d with Appendix 4d, the *Deborah* leaf contains cues for entirely different texts that do not match any of Carestini's substantial Italian arias in *Esther* and *Athalia*. The circumstances influencing the preparation of the bilingual *Deborah* seem to have been distinctively different: all the Italian texts in *Deborah* are translations for the original English music, which shows that Handel deliberately avoided inserting new music for Carestini in *Deborah*. This is contrary to his usual practice in 1735, and the more conservative revision method makes it likelier that the Berg Collection copy represents Carestini's first fledgling attempt to perform in an English oratorio. There can be little doubt that this occasion was the revival of *Deborah* in April 1734. The firmest evidence to support this is the actual content of the alterations sheet. In 1735 Carestini was the only member of Handel's cast who needed to sing his role (Barak) in Italian, but the Berg Collection leaf contains Italian texts which correlate with the practical needs of the 1733-4 opera company cast. Italian recitatives and aria texts were deemed necessary for Sisera (the alto Maria Negri) and the First Israelite and Israelite Woman (both sung by the soprano castrato Carlo Scalzi). Scalzi's performance of these Italian texts is confirmed by evidence in M C/258,<sup>660</sup> and he only sang for Handel's opera company in the 1733-4 season. His role as Israelite would have reverted to English texts for Cecilia Young in 1735. The bilingual version of *Deborah* evident in the Berg Collection wordbook can only date from 1734.

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<sup>660</sup> See Appendix 5a footnote 125.

This new interpretation of the evidence gives detailed information about the content, disposition and date of Handel's first bilingual performance of an oratorio,<sup>661</sup> and predates the previous known earliest examples of *Esther* and *Athalia* by one season. The revision process required new Italian texts for old English music, and the awkwardness of this task might explain why *Deborah* was the only oratorio performed during the 1733-4 King's Theatre opera season. Perhaps Handel found that adapting English arias into Italian was more trouble than it was worth, which offers a plausible reason why Handel decided to compose new music for Carestini in the 1735 revivals of *Esther* and *Athalia* instead of adapting all of the existing part into Italian.

Using the Berg Collection wordbook and evidence in M C/258, it is possible to piece together the bilingual 1734 *Deborah*. All of the Italian alterations listed on the Berg leaf are cued by pencil lines in the margin of the wordbook, but there are also additional cuts indicated by the same method. Some of the cues printed on the Berg leaf have incorrect page numbers, but the literal meaning of the Italian texts and the pencil lines in the wordbook help to avoid potential confusion. Several 1733b cuts were retained, but the evidence is not conclusive about whether or not the oratorio was performed in two or three parts.<sup>662</sup> Handel's revisions for the bilingual performances in 1734 were:

- I.i Barak's recit. 'O Deborah! with wise prediction bless'd' in Italian
- Barak and Deborah's duet 'Where would thy ardours raise me' in Italian
- Chorus 'Forbear thy doubts!' cut
- Deborah's Invocation ('By that adorable decree') reinstated
- Chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer' reinstated
- Two lines of recitative reinstated in Deborah's 'Ye sons of Israel'
- Chorus 'O blast, with thy tremendous brow' reinstated
- Barak's recit. and 'How lovely is the blooming fair' in Italian, in G
- I.ii Deborah's four lines of recitative before 'Choirs of angels' reinstated

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<sup>661</sup> *Acis and Galatea* was performed in a bilingual version in 1732, but it is not an oratorio.

<sup>662</sup> I have assumed that a three-part structure was performed, and accordingly follow the scene numbering in the libretto.



- Four lines of Jael's recitative cut
- Jael's 'To joy he brightens my despair' in Italian, sung by First Israelite
- I.iii Abinoam's 'Awake the ardour of thy breast' cut
- Barak's recitative and 'All danger disdaining' in Italian
- Chorus 'Let thy deeds be glorious' cut
- I.iv Barak's four lines of recitative cut
- I.v Barak's two lines of recitative cut, so Part 1 ends with Deborah's recitative
- II.ii Sisera's recitative 'That here rebellious arms' cut
- Sisera's 'At my feet extended low' in Italian
- Sisera's recitative 'Yes, how your God in wonders can excel' cut
- Sisera's 'Whilst you boast' in Italian
- Deborah's recitative 'Fly, I conjure thee' and Sisera's response cut
- Quartet and chorus 'All your boasts will end in woe' cut
- Barak's recitative and 'In the battle fame pursuing' in Italian
- Abinoam's recitative and 'Swift inundation' cut
- Deborah and Barak's duet 'Smiling freedom' in Italian
- III.i Israelite's recitative and 'Now sweetly smiling peace' in Italian
- III.ii Three lines of recitative cut
- III.iii Israelite Woman's 'Our fears are now for ever fled' cut
- Barak's recitative 'I saw the tyrant breathless in his tent' cut
- Deborah's 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed' reinstated
- Barak's recitative and 'Low at her feet' in Italian

In addition to the adaptation of Barak's role for Carestini, we can observe other general trends from the above list of changes. Sisera's role was abridged and put into Italian for Maria Negri, who sang two arias and no recitatives. Despite Durastanti's name being written in M C/258 on a few occasions, it is doubtful that she ever sang for Handel in his London oratorio performances; the role of Israelite Woman was merged with the First

Israelite and was sung in Italian by Scalzi.<sup>663</sup> Jael's role was reduced to ten lines of recitative and two arias for Rosa Negri. The role of Abinoam was also reduced to ten lines of recitative; two of his three arias were omitted.

**The hypothetical, abandoned and condensed versions of *Deborah*  
(1735, 1737 and the 1738 'Oratorio')**

Handel prepared two more bilingual versions of *Deborah* in 1735 and 1737, although it is impossible to be certain that the 1737 arrangement was completed because the performance was cancelled. No printed wordbooks survive for either version and M C/258 contains incomplete evidence, but we can be reasonably sure about the content of the version performed in April 1735. Appendix 5c outlines the known and probable details of the 1735 version. Handel's changes can be summarised thus:

- I.ii                Lines reinstated in Jael's recitative 'My transports'  
                      Jael's 'To joy he brightens my despair' in English
- I.iii               Abinoam's recitative 'Barak, my son' cut
- II.ii               Sisera's recit. 'That here rebellious arms I see' reinstated, sung by tenor  
                      Sisera's 'At my feet extended low' cut  
                      Sisera's recit. 'Yes, how your God in wonders' reinstated, sung by tenor  
                      Sisera's 'Whilst you boast' cut  
                      Israelite's recit. and 'No more disconsolate' in English, adapted for tenor
- III.i                Israelite Woman's recit. and 'Now sweetly smiling' in English
- III.iii             Israelite Woman's 'Our fears are now for ever fled' perhaps reinstated

Carestini's part was probably identical to that in 1734. The rest of the performance was in English, with Sisera, Jael and the Israelite roles reverting to English texts. M C/258 contains pencil markings that show Cecilia Young doubled roles as Jael and the Israelite

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<sup>663</sup> See Appendix 5a footnotes 135 and 154.



Woman (as Gismondi had done in the original 1733a version). The Covent Garden tenor Thomas Salway also sang two roles (Sisera and Israelite), but did not sing either of Sisera's arias - a complete reversal of Maria Negri's performance of the role the previous year, in which she sang both arias but no recitatives. M C/258 also indicates that the Baalite Priest was sung by the bass 'Hussey', and suggests that Abinoam's contribution was probably reduced yet further.

Nearly two years later, Handel planned to revive *Deborah* again. Its forthcoming performance was mentioned in the *London Daily Post* on 11 March 1737:

We hear, since Operas have been forbidden being performed at the Theatre in Covent Garden on the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, Mr. Handel is preparing Dryden's Ode of Alexander's Feast, the Oratorios of Esther and Deborah, with several new Concertos for the Organ and other Instruments; also an Entertainment of Musick, called *Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verita*, which Performances will be brought on the Stage and varied every Week.<sup>664</sup>

M C/258 contains some pencil markings and cues that must have been made for the proposed revival, but Handel never performed this version of *Deborah*. It is not known when he planned to perform it, nor if he completed adapting the oratorio for his 1737 opera cast: it is possible that he decided against reviving the oratorio whilst still in the process of revising it. The programme of 1736-7 season is shown in Appendix 1 Figure 9, and the calendar of performances suggests that Handel instead preferred to alternate *Alexander's Feast* and his new reworking of *Il Trionfo del Tempo*. Although he became seriously ill towards the end of the season, it is unlikely that his health influenced his decision not to revive *Deborah*. There are no obvious gaps in the schedule where an aborted performance might have been planned. It is conceivable that he might have intended to produce *Deborah* on 13 April 1737, but that he instead decided to perform the pasticcio *Didone*

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<sup>664</sup> Deutsch, p. 428. Burrows observed that the announcement might have been published late because 11 March was two weeks into Lent in 1737 (*Handel*, p. 193).

featuring arias by Hasse and Vinci in order to compete more aggressively with the Opera of the Nobility.

Appendix 5c illustrates what alterations the composer might have planned for the aborted 1737 revival of *Deborah*. Annibali would have sung Barak's role using the same Italian texts as Carestini, although he would have probably sung 'Più bella spoglia sarà fral' in E major (Carestini seems to have sung it transposed up to G). Conti would have sung the same part as Scalzi had in 1734: Handel's pencil marking on M C/258 f. 35v reveals that Conti would have sung the First Israelite's 'Chi spera in Dio'. There were definitely Italian insertions for Conti: Handel wrote the cue 'Signr Conti Angelico Splendor' on f. 89r, and this would have replaced 'No more disconsolate' (which had been omitted in 1734, but reinstated in 1735). Handel wrote 'Signr Conti aria' on M C/258 f. 117v, but the rest of the cue is now illegible and it is not possible to identify the Italian aria text that would have been performed between the chorus 'Doleful tidings' and Deborah's recitative 'Jael, if I aright divine'.<sup>665</sup>

Jael's aria 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing' has an Italian alternative text that was definitely used in the 1738 'Oratorio'. However, it is not possible to discern whether the soprano Chimenti would have sung 'Oh il piacere che l'alma rissante' in *Deborah*, if Handel intended her to sing in Italian but did not complete the revision of the part for her, or if she might have sung Jael's role entirely in English. Henry Reinhold was surprisingly under-used in the 1734 and 1735 revivals, in which Abinoam's role was reduced to only one aria and a few short recitatives. M C/258 contains markings which suggest that Handel would have given Reinhold a more prominent status in 1737, combining the roles of Abinoam (including at least some recitative restored) and Sisera, whose recitatives and arias were probably sung in the original 1733 keys, but with the alto vocal part transposed down an octave for bass.

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<sup>665</sup> See Appendix 5c.



There is some difficulty in accurately interpreting Handel's pencil markings in M C/258 regarding Chimenti, William Savage and John Beard. Neither of the English singers had hitherto sung in any version of *Deborah*, although it is possible that markings relating to each of them could date from as early as 1735, and such examples could reflect potential alterations that Handel abandoned during the revision process.<sup>666</sup> All three singers probably participated in Handel's 1738 'Oratorio', which was produced at the King's Theatre on 28 March 1738 for the composer's own benefit. Burrows speculated that the 'occasion might have been Handel's best-attended theatre performance ever in London.'<sup>667</sup> It was Handel's first performance for his own benefit since a performance of *Teseo* in May 1713, and he reputedly made £1000 from the occasion. Burrows described its peculiar mixture of music, observing that:

The main substance of the *Oratorio* comes in Part Two, into which Handel compressed *Deborah*: even the framework of the first and last choruses of the oratorio was preserved. Around this, in the other two Parts, he arranged various miscellaneous pieces, certainly with a view to their suitability for his Italian singers, and probably also as a display of some of his most striking concert music.<sup>668</sup>

Burrows tabulated the content of the 1738 'Oratorio' in detail.<sup>669</sup> The condensed bilingual version of *Deborah* in Part 2 features almost all of the highlights of the score.<sup>670</sup> There are two extant wordbooks of the pasticcio, but no separate score seems to have been prepared for the occasion. The performance material was probably stitched together from extant conducting scores, thus creating some confusion in M C/258 about which pencil markings

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<sup>666</sup> For example, Beard and Cecilia Young could not have sung the same music in 1735, nor could Reinhold and Savage perform the same role in 1737.

<sup>667</sup> 'Handel's 1738 'Oratorio': A Benefit Pasticcio', pp. 11-2.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-7. Dean also outlined some of the content (Op. cit., p. 238).

<sup>670</sup> 'In Jehovah's awful sight' and 'In the battle fame pursuing' are the only numbers of notable quality omitted from the 1738 pasticcio.

from around this period correspond to the aborted 1737 revival of *Deborah*, or to the condensed version that formed the core of the pasticcio. The cast for the 1738 pasticcio was probably drawn from the opera company that had recently performed *Faramondo*: Caffarelli (s-cas), Francesina (s), Chimenti (s), Savage (tr), Merighi (a), Marchesini (mez-s), Montagnana (b) and Lottini (b). Burrows added that 'It is very likely that [Handel] brought Beard in as a soloist-cum-chorus singer'.<sup>671</sup> It was for the 1738 pasticcio that Handel prepared a version of Athalia's 'My vengeance awakes me' for Beard, which the composer retained in his 1744a *Deborah*.

### The contrary *Deborah* (1744a/b)

Handel ceased composing and performing Italian operas in London after 1741.<sup>672</sup> By 1744, he had long been resolved to confine his main musical output to English theatre works. In the summer of 1743, Lord Middlesex attempted to entice Handel to return to composing operas for his opera company founded four years earlier. John Christopher Smith snr recorded that:

It seems that Mr. Handel promis'd my Lord Middlesex, that if He would give him for two new operas 1000 G[uineas] and his Health would permit, He would compose for him next Season, after which he declin'd his promise and said that He could - or would [-] do nothing for the Opera Directors, altho' the Prince of Wales desired him at several times to accept of their offers, and compose for them, and said that by so doing He would not only oblige the King & the Royal Family but likewise all the Quality. When my Lord Middlesex saw that no persuasion would take place with Him, and seeing himself engaged in such an undertaking without a Composer He sent for one from Italy, of whom nobody has any great opinion.

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid., p. 22. The cast of soloists and Beard's participation are confirmed by the Earl of Shaftesbury's letter to James Harris dated 14 March 1738 (in Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 43-5).

<sup>672</sup> David Hunter recently presented a convincing argument that Handel's chronic health after his stroke in 1737 was a decisive factor for the change ('Miraculous Recovery? Handel's Illnesses, The Narrative Tradition of Heroic Strength and the Oratorio Turn' in *Eighteenth-century Music*, September 2006).



Nevertheless He would still make some fresh Proposals to Mr. Handel, and let Him know how much regard He had for his composition, and that He would put it in his power to make it as easy to Himself as He pleased.<sup>673</sup>

Although Handel was initially tempted to compose more Italian operas, he entertained second thoughts that led him to decide firmly against it, even though his final resolution apparently threatened his friendships with Smith and the Prince of Wales. David Hunter speculated that:

Handel's unwillingness to write operas for the Middlesex company ... even when pressured by the Prince of Wales was correctly seen by Christopher Smith as selfish, but we can now understand that it was made in the context of a preference for his own brand of entertainment ... solidified by acute and chronic illness.<sup>674</sup>

Perhaps Handel also felt that he had spent long enough attempting to establish artistic and managerial independence that he did not want to make a retrograde step back into the control of aristocratic directors. He had managed without them since 1728; Burrows surmised that Handel 'faced considerable difficulty in sustaining his independence from the 'Middlesex' opera company', but that he 'wanted no more to do with the old-style opera companies and their managements'.<sup>675</sup>

Whether we admire Handel's desire for financial and artistic independence, or sympathise with his pragmatic response to ill health, it was a decision that created him a fresh set of enemies and intensified the competition between his oratorio season and Middlesex's operas. It was a situation that cannot have been soothed by Handel's determination to set Congreve's *Semele*, a libretto written for an operatic venture that was abandoned in 1707 before it could be performed. It seems pointedly defiant that the most

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<sup>673</sup> Letter to the Earl of Shaftesbury, 28 July 1743, *HHB* vol. IV, pp. 363-4.

<sup>674</sup> Hunter: *Op. cit.*, p. 264. However, it should be noted that there is no evidence that Handel's condition of ill health was continuous.

<sup>675</sup> *Handel*, pp. 272-3.

overtly operatic English work Handel ever composed was undertaken shortly after he had rejected Middlesex's repeated offers to compose for him. First performed on 10 February 1744, *Semele* was not well attended, possibly owing to the 'strong party against it'.<sup>676</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems that Handel's subscription season of twelve concerts at Covent Garden between 10 February and 21 March 1744 was reasonably successful. The venture must have done well enough to give Handel the confidence to plan a longer season at the King's Theatre on a scale that he had not attempted since 1737. Handel's plan was announced in the *Daily Advertiser* and *General Advertiser* on 20 October 1744:

Mr, HANDEL proposes to perform by Subscription, Twenty-Four Times, during the Winter Season, at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market, and engages to exhibit two new Performances, and several of his former Oratorios. The first Performance will be on Saturday the 3d of November, and continue every Saturday till Lent, and then on Wednesdays and Fridays. Each subscriber is to pay Eight Guineas at the Time he subscribes, which entitles him to one Box Ticket for each Performance.<sup>677</sup>

Perhaps Handel's confidence was buoyed by the excellence of his new masterpieces *Hercules* and *Belshazzar*, composed between July and October 1744. The 'former oratorios' were to include *Deborah*, *Semele*, *Samson*, *Saul*, *Joseph & his Brethren* and *Messiah*. Burrows considered that:

At 24 performances, this was still only about half of the number that had been conventional for opera seasons, but it represented a considerable speculative challenge in relation to the London audience. The immediate stimulant to Handel's scheme was the collapse of the 'Middlesex' opera company: Handel determined to move back into the King's Theatre, Haymarket, and offer his own programme of English works 'after the manner of an Oratorio' as a substitute for opera. It was perhaps the one aggressive competitive gesture of his career: he wanted those who

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<sup>676</sup> Mrs Delany's letter to Mrs Dewes, 21 February 1744 (*Deutsch*, p. 584).

<sup>677</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 596.



had undertaken to 'middle with harmony' not merely to be beaten but to be seen to be beaten.<sup>678</sup>

Handel must have started rehearsals by the time he completed the draft score of *Belshazzar* on 23 October, and his decision to launch the new season with a revised version of *Deborah* suggests that he regarded the oratorio as a grand spectacular entertainment fitting for opening such an ambitious series.<sup>679</sup> The opening night on 3 November was ill-timed: most of Handel's subscribers were out of Town<sup>680</sup> and it clashed with the opening night of *Richard III* starring David Garrick.<sup>681</sup> George Harris wrote to James Harris that 'I wasn't last Saturday at Deborah myself, but those that that were say, that pit and boxes were extreme thin; the gallery, indeed, was pretty full; that, in short, it seem'd a desolate forsaken house'.<sup>682</sup> James Harris received a fuller account from the Earl of Radnor in a letter written on the same date:

I have subscribed to Handel, and made my appearance Saturday at Deborough for the first time, where I found the Prince and Princes[s] [of Wales], but a very empty house below stairs. Am told it was better above. I attribute this in great measure to the early season, but Captain Bodens tells me of ten assembly's made against him, as also Lady Brown, who engaged every soul she knew at the play the same night. This is but an ill requital for the great additional expence he has lately put himself to; in short Lady Brown and such fine Italian ladeys, wil bear nothing but Italian singers, and composers, and I hope wee may be able when the town fills to muster up a large party of another opinion.<sup>683</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> Op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>679</sup> Perhaps the King's Theatre still had the materials used for the special visual aspect of the oratorio's first run of performances in 1733.

<sup>680</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, 5 November 1744 (*Deutsch*, p. 598).

<sup>681</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 280.

<sup>682</sup> Letter dated 6 November 1744, in Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 202-3.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

In his commentary of the letter quoted above, Burrows suggested that ‘Handel’s ‘great additional expence’ probably involved the extended hire of the theatre, and an unusually large number of performers ... Clearly Handel had a more substantial group of performers, orchestral and vocal, than in previous seasons.’ If so, the large-scale opulence of the oratorio’s first performance in 1733 was an element that Handel consciously desired to repeat in 1744. The Earl of Radnor found it noteworthy that ‘The archester consisted of the very best hands of all sorts ... and was numerous, and apeard very magnificent[;] we had al the boys from the chapell, and abundance of other voices to fill up’. After the second performance on 24 November, George Harris reported that ‘There is the best band of instruments that he ever had; Caporali, Miller, the lute and the best double basses, 22 fiddles ... and the 3 women performd their parts extremely well’, but lamented that ‘there was not so great an appearance of company as could be wishd, though much better than it was the time before.’<sup>684</sup>

There was a three-week delay between the two performances of *Deborah*, supposedly because Handel’s subscribers out of town requested it,<sup>685</sup> although Thomas Harris doubted the truth of this.<sup>686</sup> Perhaps the real reason was the poor health and vocal problems of several members of the cast: the Earl of Radnor had noticed that ‘Mrs Cybber apeard much indisposed with a cold’ and that John Beard was ‘sometimes out of tune, and upon the whole much worse then formerly’ owing to an ear problem.<sup>687</sup> There seems to have been some improvement for the second performance on 24 November, after which the music publisher John Walsh wrote that ‘Deborah never was done so well as twas last Saterdag’. Walsh’s letter also contains evidence which suggests that the financial management of the season was not going according to plan and that Handel was not hoping

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<sup>684</sup> Letter to James Harris, 24 November 1744, Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>685</sup> A public announcement claiming that Handel was ‘requested not to perform till Saturday the 24th’ was published in the *Daily Advertiser* on 5 November 1744 (*Deutsch*, p. 598).

<sup>686</sup> Letter from Thomas Harris to James Harris, 8 November 1744, in Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.



for anything more than breaking even: 'He tells me he has not lost by his houses yet, & will be contented this year if he does not lose.'<sup>688</sup>

Unfortunately, the 1744 season continued to be dogged by misfortune. The first performance of *Hercules* on 5 January 1745 was badly affected by Mrs Cibber's illness: some of her part seems to have been read (or perhaps sung) by Gustavus Waltz, who according to the Earl of Shaftesbury had 'such a miserable hoarseness, that he was hardly able to utter a word.'<sup>689</sup> Despite members of Handel's orchestra having the opinion that Handel had 'never wrote any-thing beyond it in his life', the failure of *Hercules* aroused genuine concern for Handel from his supporters. The Earl of Shaftesbury concluded that 'seeing things go on so horribly, the poor man must to save himself from ruin think of retiring, and his friends have it now under consideration (with great privacy) what step he ought to take.' On 17 January 1745, only a quarter of the way through his intended season, the *Daily Advertiser* published a letter from Handel announcing his doubt that he would be able to complete the subscription concerts.<sup>690</sup> Handel's public request that his patrons permit him to abandon his season generated enough support to cause him to publish another letter a week later, expressing gratitude for his loyal subscribers who had not withdrawn their money. Handel announced that 'though I am not able to fulfill the whole part of my Engagement, I shall think it my Duty to perform what Part of it I can'.<sup>691</sup>

There were no performances during February 1745, and it is likely that Handel's closest supporters were 'against his doing anything till Lent.'<sup>692</sup> The season recommenced on 1 March with *Samson*, after which it resembled a customary Lenten season, with ten performances of six different works (see Appendix 1 Figure 12). Contemporary accounts suggest that even the Lenten oratorios were not as well attended as they had been in the

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<sup>688</sup> Letter to James Harris, 27 November 1744, Ibid., p. 207. Walsh confirmed that the second night audience was slightly better: 'I believe there 50 people more in the pit than the first.'

<sup>689</sup> Letter from the Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 8 January 1745, Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>690</sup> *Deutsch*, p. 602.

<sup>691</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, 25 January 1745 (Ibid., p. 606).

<sup>692</sup> Letter from George Harris to James Harris, 2 February 1745 (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 213).

past.<sup>693</sup> The season ended with a performance of *Belshazzar* on 23 April 1745. Instead of the promised twenty-four performances, Handel had given sixteen. Charles Jennens attributed the season's poor success to Handel's 'own imprudence in changing the profitable method he was in before for a new & hazardous Experiment.'<sup>694</sup> Handel did not attempt the experiment of an operatic-style schedule of oratorios again. These were also his last performances at the King's Theatre, where he had made his London debut with *Rinaldo* in 1711, served as music director for the Royal Academy of Music for nine years, and performed most of his Second Academy seasons.

Although the two performances of *Deborah* during Handel's vastly ambitious 1744-5 season were only three weeks apart, the extant wordbooks contradict each other regarding the performing versions. Appendix 5b illustrates that a unique copy in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection contains a version of the libretto expanded by the addition of numerous airs transferred from other oratorios. All of the other known 1744 wordbooks contain an amended text with fewer added airs. An eyewitness account written by the Earl of Radnor supports the probability that the Coke Collection wordbook contains the version that was performed on 3 November 1744: three days later, Radnor wrote to James Harris that 'some old songs in a former oratorio where put in' for Mrs Cibber. Radnor clarified that the cast featured Francesina, Miss Robinson and Mrs Cibber.<sup>695</sup>

Dean's remark that 'the second of the two performances ... had a different cast, with Italian singers ignorant of English' must now be regarded as entirely incorrect.<sup>696</sup> No Italian texts were sung in the 1744 performances of *Deborah*, nor were any Italian singers involved. Similarly, Dean's suggestion that some of the 1744 alterations 'probably

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<sup>693</sup> In a letter to Catherine Talbot probably written on 2 April 1745, Elizabeth Carter reports that 'Handel, once so crowded, plays to empty walls in that opera house, where there used to be a constant audience as long as there were any dancers to be seen' (*Deutsch*, pp. 610-11).

<sup>694</sup> Letter to Holdsworth, 21 February 1745, in *HHB* vol. IV, p. 386.

<sup>695</sup> Burrows & Dunhill: *Op. cit.*, p. 204. This description matches the content of the wordbook in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection.

<sup>696</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 238. Dean seems to have recognized the fragility of his argument: 'there is so much confusion about the text ... that little can be regarded as proven beyond doubt.' (p. 244). His statement about Italian arias in the 1744 revival of *Deborah* was based on a misinterpretation of the inserted leaf containing Italian texts now bound incorrectly in the Schoelcher Collection copy of the 1744 wordbook.



originated in 1735' does not withstand scrutiny.<sup>697</sup> It is possible that the second performance featured a cast that was slightly different from the first, but George Harris attended it and wrote that 'the 3 women performed their parts extremely well',<sup>698</sup> and it is logical to assume that he was referring to Francesina, Robinson and Cibber. If the cast was identical in both performances, then it is possible that Mrs Cibber's poor health enforced the revisions contained in the 1744b wordbooks in order to make her contribution less vocally taxing on 24 November 1744.<sup>699</sup>

Handel had not performed *Deborah* entirely in English since the Oxford performance in July 1733, but he did not revive either of the 1733 versions. He needed to adapt the oratorio for the cast that he had engaged for his ambitious 1744 King's Theatre season, which included fewer soprano and alto voices than his opera companies had normally done during the previous decade. Most of the alterations and insertions he made in 1744 were for the alto Mrs Cibber (in the role of Jael, previously sung by a soprano) and the tenor John Beard (in the role of Sisera, usually sung by an alto but always sung by Beard from 1744 onwards). There were a few revisions to Part 1. The chorus 'Forbear thy doubts' was reinstated, having been cut in 1734. After the chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer', Mrs Cibber performed the accompanied recitative 'Methinks I hear the mother's groans' and aria 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide' from *Esther*. This was located in a position where Jael had not previously had an aria. It is a striking coincidence that in *Esther* the music precedes the chorus 'Ye sons of Israel mourn', and in the 1744a version of *Deborah* the music precedes Deborah's recitative 'Ye sons of Israel, cease your fears': the textual similarity of the references to the sons of Israel might have triggered Handel's decision to insert the *Esther* music in 1744. There is no copy of 'Methinks I hear the mother's groans ... O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide' inserted in M C/258, but it seems likely

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>698</sup> Letter to James Harris, 24 November 1744, in Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>699</sup> No hypothesis regarding the contradictory wordbooks can be absolutely certain until further evidence is discovered, but each variant libretto text contains a complete authentic version of the oratorio that is valid for discussion in this thesis.

that Handel would have saved his copyist some effort by using the relevant folios from the conducting score of *Esther* instead.<sup>700</sup> Rather than adapting Jael's 'To joy he brightens my despair' for Mrs Cibber, the composer inserted more music from *Esther*: the aria 'Flowing joys do now surround me' was based on Esther's 'Flatt'ring tongue, no more I'll hear thee', although the original source in *Esther* is a soprano aria so the *Deborah* arrangement was presumably transposed.<sup>701</sup> If so, Handel's decision not to transpose or adapt Jael's 1733a aria did not save him any trouble.

Abinoam's 1733 role was fully restored, including all his recitatives and arias. Barak's role was based on Senesino's original part, including some reinstated recitatives that had not been performed during the mid-1730s; it is possible that a rewritten vocal part in the recitative 'I go, where Heaven and duty call' might have been composed for Miss Robinson in 1744. Likewise, Deborah's role was based on the music for Strada. The chorus 'Let thy deeds be glorious' was performed for the first time since 1733b. The insertion of the aria 'My vengeance awakes me' for the Herald suggests that Beard doubled as both Caananite aggressors: Although originally a soprano air for the title-role in *Athalia*, the adjusted version – transposed up from B flat to D - of the music added to *Deborah* in 1744 had been created a decade earlier for the tenor solo 'Strength and honour are her clothing' in the Wedding Anthem *This is the day*; although the identity of the soloist in 1734 is unspecified in the sources, it was probably John Beard, who certainly sang the air in Handel's 1738 'Benefit Oratorio' concert. Moreover, the air was assigned to him (with the text 'My vengeance awakes me') in Handel's aborted 1743 version of *Athalia*. It is inconceivable that music for tenor voice that was strongly associated with Beard was sung by a secondary chorus tenor in the 1744 performances of *Deborah*.<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> M C/261 ff. 50 – 53 also contain re-copied pages dating from the 1750s, which replaced original 1732 pages that might have contained evidence of their use in M C/258.

<sup>701</sup> It is not known what key 'Flowing Joys' would have been performed in because there no trace of it survives in M C/258. It was probably written on inserted folios that were later removed.

<sup>702</sup> It is possible that in 1744 the Herald and Sisera merged into one character, but the evidence is not conclusive.



The composer was evidently unconvinced by his original 1733a scheme for ending Part 1. It is not clear what his solution to the problem was during the 1730s, but in 1744 he re-set the chorus text 'Despair all around them' as a recitative for Deborah, and gave her the aria 'Cease, o Judah, cease thy mourning' based on Josabeth's aria 'Through the land, so lovely blooming' that he had composed for the 1735 London version of *Athalia*. The insertion is not in M C/258 because the folios containing Part 1 scenes 4-5 for 1744a were removed and replaced with different folios by J.C. Smith jr in the 1760s. However, Deborah's text is written on the autograph manuscript of 'Through the land, so lovely blooming'.<sup>703</sup> Part 1 ended with another insertion from *Athalia*: a choral 'Hallelujah' that had served the same purpose in its original source.<sup>704</sup>

II.ii contains Sisera's confrontation with the Israelites. Although Beard sang the same recitatives and arias that Negri had performed in 1733a, the conducting score shows that the vocal parts in both 'At my feet extended low' and 'Whilst you boast' were recomposed in 1744, with Beard's part written on slips pasted over the original 1733a music. The accompaniments were not altered. Handel's instruction to transpose Barak's 'Impious mortal, cease to brave us' up to D minor in the conducting score<sup>705</sup> might have been added for Miss Robinson in 1744. Sisera was granted an operatic-style exit aria in 1744 with 'Hence I hasten', taken from the aborted 1743 revival of *Athalia*. The conducting score shows that only the A section was performed, that the soprano vocal part was adapted for Beard, and that the folios containing the insertion (M C/258 ff. 77r-78v) were taken from the *Athalia* conducting score (M C/264) - which confirms that the same method could have been used for at least some of Mrs Cibber's arias derived from *Esther*. In place of the Israelite Woman's 'No more disconsolate I'll mourn', Handel inserted 'Watchful angels' from *Esther* (HWV 50b) for Mrs Cibber, probably its transposed version in E flat. The conducting score reveals that Deborah's recitative 'Now, Jael, to thy tent

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<sup>703</sup> R.M.20.f. 12, ff. 35r-38r.

<sup>704</sup> See Appendix 5a footnote 133. The same D minor chorus was also used for *As pants the hart* in Handel's 1738 Benefit oratorio.

<sup>705</sup> M C/258 f. 68r.

retire' and Jael's aria 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing' were both lowered a third, in order to accommodate Mrs Cibber. This was followed by another insertion from *Esther* with an adapted text, Deborah's 'May Heav'n attend her with each charm'.

In III.i, the aria 'Now sweetly smiling peace' was replaced by Deborah's 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed', relocated from its original position two scenes later. Jael's recitative 'O Deborah! our fears are o'er' was presumably altered for Mrs Cibber, and after the chorus 'Doleful tidings' she performed the inserted aria 'All his mercies I review'. The music for this was taken from the A section of the duet 'Cease thy anguish' from *Athalia*, but used for its B section text.<sup>706</sup> The recitatives for Barak and Jael in which they relate the assassination of Sisera were both reinstated, although Jael's vocal part was rewritten for Mrs Cibber. It was the first time that this dramatically important recitative had been performed since 1733a. However, Jael's aria 'Tyrant, now no more we dread thee' was reassigned to Deborah, and repositioned after her recitative 'Jael, if I aright divine'. The recitative was recomposed to facilitate the reordered sequence of arias. The duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' from *Esther* was inserted prior to the final chorus, although the second soprano part would have required some alteration for Mrs Cibber. The final chorus 'Let our glad songs to Heaven ascend' was shortened by the removal of its middle section.

Fewer of the insertions from *Esther* and *Athalia* are in 1744b, but the variants mainly correspond to a retrenchment of Mrs Cibber's role. Jael's 1733 text 'To joy he brightens my despair' replaced the 1744a insertion 'Flowing joys do now surround me', but perhaps set to new music in A minor.<sup>707</sup> The Israelite Woman's 1733 recitative and aria 'Oh Judah ... No more disconsolate, I'll mourn' was reassigned to Jael and transposed

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<sup>706</sup> See Appendix 4a footnote 159.

<sup>707</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 243. The music is extant in M C/258 ff. 37v-38r. It was written by the copyist S5 (active 1757-68) on paper that dates from no later than 1763, so it is certain this copy was made for Smith jr's performances of *Deborah* after Handel's death. However, it is possible that the folios are a fresh copy of music inserted in 1744b, which would have been removed in 1754.



down to F minor,<sup>708</sup> replacing the 1744a insertion of 'Watchful angels' from *Esther*.<sup>709</sup> The 1744b version does not contain Jael's 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing', nor her 1744a insertions 'Methinks I hear the mother's groans', 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide' and 'All his mercies I review'. The other alterations in 1744b are comparatively minor: Deborah's recitative 'Barak, we now to battle go' is cut; her 1744a insertions 'Cease, o Judah, cease thy mourning' and 'May Heav'n attend her with each charm' are both omitted. The 'Hallelujah' is not included at the end of Part 1 in the 1744b wordbook, but this was probably a mere oversight by the printers.

### *Deborah* in 1754

It is possible to imagine that Handel's bad experiences of *Deborah* in November 1744 made him cautious about producing the oratorio again during the next few years, although this would have been out of character: the comparably bad experience of the oratorio's first performance in March 1733 had not hindered him from reviving it at Oxford a few months later and in both of his next seasons. There is no apparent reason why he did not perform *Deborah* again for a decade, apart from the general increase in his oratorio repertoire which made him less reliant on his earliest efforts in the genre.

Handel's problems with his eyesight had grown worse during the composition of *Jephtha* between January 1751 and the oratorio's eventual completion the following August. That summer, he suffered a stroke and despite surgery and the hopes of his friends, it was announced on 27 January 1753 that 'Mr Handel has at length, unhappily, quite lost his sight'.<sup>710</sup> Burrows observed that 'Handel probably retained a small residue of eyesight in 1753 and may have been able to scrawl a few singers' names into the conducting scores of the oratorios that were to be performed that year.'<sup>711</sup> At the Foundling Hospital performance of *Messiah* on 1 May 1753, his performance of 'a Voluntary on the fine

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<sup>708</sup> M C/258 f. 90r.

<sup>709</sup> Although in 1733a the same soprano performed both roles.

<sup>710</sup> 'From a London newspaper' (source unknown, *Deutsch*, p. 731).

<sup>711</sup> *Handel*, p. 359.

Organ he gave to that Chapel' was until recently thought to be his last documented public performance.<sup>712</sup> Burrows suggested that 'it is not impossible that Handel might occasionally have performed in later seasons. No doubt his health and morale fluctuated, and the variations were sufficiently unpredictable to deter any pre-advertisement of his participation.'<sup>713</sup> However, his capacity for preparing revisions of his oratorios must have been reduced from August 1751 onwards, and after January 1753 it seems certain that 'the younger Smith gradually moved into the position of being the principal arranger, editor and adapter ... perhaps working from time to time on the basis of suggestions made by Handel.'<sup>714</sup>

Although the 1757 revival of *Esther* contains inserted music almost certainly composed by the J.C. Smith jr, and also what is arguably Handel's own last composition (the duet 'Sion now her head shall raise'), it seems that Smith's role was less intrusive in the oratorio revivals of the preceding seasons. Perhaps Smith's role in the preparation of oratorio revisions grew more creatively active and influential as the decade progressed, no doubt as a direct practical response to Handel's contributions becoming less detailed and energetic owing to the composer's decline. The 1754 Lenten oratorio season at Covent Garden amounted to eleven performances between 1 March and 5 April, during which Smith organised revivals of seven different oratorios (see Appendix 1 Figure 14).<sup>715</sup> *Alexander Balus* was revived for the first time since 1748,<sup>716</sup> along with the other 'victory' oratorios *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Joshua*. This type of militaristic work was popular with Handel's audiences, but the inclusion of *Saul* and *Samson* suggests that Handel continued

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<sup>712</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 2 May 1753 (*Deutsch*, p. 742). Burrows speculated that the wording of the report implies that Handel performed a solo *ad libitum* movement 'and may not have played in the concerted movements.' (Op. cit., p. 361).

<sup>713</sup> Ibid. The papers of the Harris family include a letter dated 27 March 1756 from Thomas Harris to his brother James, in which he reports that Handel's performances on the organ were 'as good as ever', and also George Harris' diary entry on 9 April 1756 mentioning Handel's performance of an organ concerto at *Messiah* on 5 April (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., pp. 310-2).

<sup>714</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>715</sup> On 25 February 1754 the *Public Advertiser* announced a performance of *Samson* 'For the Benefit of Signora Frasi', which was to take place on 2 April, but either this was inaccurate or the performance was cancelled.

<sup>716</sup> A planned revival in 1751 was aborted following the death of the Prince of Wales.



to esteem and promote his more intensely emotional character-based dramas. According to the 'established annual pattern' of Handel's last years,<sup>717</sup> the season closed with a performance of *Messiah*, which was performed again at the Foundling Hospital on 15 May.<sup>718</sup>

Although not as varied and impressive as some of Handel's seasons during the 1730s and 1740s, the plans still suggest that variety of musical styles and oratorio-types (such as 'victory', tragic, heroic, and scriptural) were still decisive factors in Handel's programming of his seasons. Burrows noticed that during the mid-1750s 'Smith (or Handel) followed a policy of giving the more recondite oratorios a hearing by turns, as well as re-presenting the trusted favourites'.<sup>719</sup> It is also notable that an increased number of performances of Handel's music were given by other people: in February 1754 there were performances of *Acis & Galatea* in London (for Galli's benefit) and *L'Allegro* at Oxford; in May there seem to have been performances of *Acis & Galatea* and *Esther* at Oxford, where the following month William Hayes directed *L'Allegro*, *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Messiah*; Handel's music formed the bulk of the Three Choirs event at Gloucester in September;<sup>720</sup> *Alexander's Feast* was performed at Oxford in November. There was even a revival of the opera *Admeto* at the King's Theatre.<sup>721</sup> By 1754 neither Handel nor the capital city commanded a monopoly on his music.<sup>722</sup>

It is notable that Smith did not need or desire to make any significant revisions for the version of *Deborah* performed on 8 and 13 March 1754: the cast was similar in voice-types to that of 1744 so the music required only minor adaptation, and it must have been

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<sup>717</sup> Burrows: Op. cit., p. 362.

<sup>718</sup> A performance of *L'Allegro*, supplemented by the *Ode for St Cecilia*, at Covent Garden on 23 May 1754 was announced in the *Public Advertiser* (Deutsch, p. 750), but there is no evidence that Handel and Smith organized it.

<sup>719</sup> Op. cit., p. 363. Burrows noted that the policy did not include secular works. It may be significant that the overtly operatic secular music dramas *Semele* and *Hercules* were not revived.

<sup>720</sup> Information regarding performances of Handel's music during 1754 is taken from Deutsch, pp. 746-57.

<sup>721</sup> The production of Handel's opera *Admeto* at the King's Theatre by Vanneschi's opera company was contemporary with Handel's revival of *Deborah*. Although composed twenty-seven years before, *Admeto* had a reasonably good run of six performances from 12 March until 6 April 1754 (see Burrows: Op. cit., p. 406). These were the last performances of any Handel opera during the composer's lifetime.

<sup>722</sup> *Deborah* was not among those works frequently revived. Other than a series of revivals in Dublin between 1745 and 1753, the only other documented regional performance was at Edinburgh in 1754 (Dean: Op. cit., pp. 632-3).

easier for Smith to avoid making alterations that were not strictly necessary. It is possible that Smith's efforts were instead concentrated on the more extensive preparation demanded by the revival of *Saul*, performed soon after on 15 March (and repeated five days later), although the Handel/Smith revivals of *Saul* and *Samson* also seem to have been closely based on their most recent previous versions.<sup>723</sup>

The only known copy of a 1754 libretto of *Deborah* is in the Gerald Coke Handel Collection. A comparison between the Coke wordbook and the conducting score reliably indicates that Handel's 1754 version of *Deborah* was almost identical in every respect to 1744b, except that the role of Jael was restored to soprano for Passerini: her aria 'To joy he brightens' was put back into D minor; 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing' was put back into G minor (it had been transposed in 1744a and cut in 1744b), and her recitative in the final scene was restored to its 1733a soprano version. Passerini also sang the Israelite Woman's 'No more disconsolate, I'll mourn' in its original key of C minor. Galli sang Barak's role using the 1733 versions, without the rewritten or transposed elements created for Miss Robinson in 1744. The recitative 'The haughty foe' was transferred to Barak, and preceded Deborah's aria 'The glorious sun', still in its 1744 position. The 'Hallelujah' was correctly printed at the end of Part 2; the Herald's aria 'My vengeance awakes me' was not performed again after 1744.

### *Deborah* in 1756

The programme of the 1755 Lenten season was a continuation of the scheme of mingling popular favourites with obscurities. In addition to the predictable inclusion of *Judas Maccabaeus* and *Messiah*, Handel and Smith appear to have decided to concentrate on odes and long-neglected oratorios during the 1755 Lenten season, with a revival of *Alexander's Feast* accompanied by its 1751 addition *The Choice of Hercules*, and a performance of *L'Allegro* supplemented by the *Ode for St Cecilia's Day*. Of the lesser-

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<sup>723</sup> For summarised details of Handel's oratorio revisions outside the scope of this thesis, see Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* and Hans Dieter Clausen: *Händels Direktionspartituren (Handexemplare)*.



known oratorios, *Joseph & his Brethren* and *Theodora* were revived, both based on their most recent previous versions, although the scale of revision was more extensive than in the oratorios revived the previous year.<sup>724</sup>

We might imagine that Handel's status as an unchallenged icon of British musical life was secure by 1755, but after the single performance of *L'Allegro* Thomas Harris wrote to his brother James that Handel's 'houses have been very thin, especially last night when he hardly paid his expences.' A few weeks later, Miss Gilbert wrote to Elizabeth Harris that 'poor Handel has been most ungratefully neglected this year, and whoever were admirers of him when in perfection ought I think to protect him in his decline. Fashion in every thing will have most followers, and consequently he is quite forsaken.'<sup>725</sup> Both letters reveal that Handel was still struggling to compete against the fickleness of his public during the last phase of his life, and they provide hitherto unsuspected evidence that the illogical pattern of box-office success and failure remained as unpredictable in the mid-1750s as it had been during Handel's most creative years.

In 1756 Handel and Smith entirely avoided performing the odes, which, despite their popularity in the more distant past, had proved unsuccessful in 1755. Instead, the Lenten oratorio season at Covent Garden between 5 March and 9 April concentrated exclusively upon biblical (or apocryphal) oratorios, mostly of the less theatrical kind that used scriptural librettos (*Israel in Egypt* and *Messiah*) or those that contained extended victory celebrations (*Deborah*, *Judas Maccabaeus*, but also *Israel in Egypt*). *Jephtha* and *Athalia* are among Handel's character-based dramatic oratorios, but *Jephtha* was only performed once, and the substantial 1756 revision of *Athalia* barely resembled the music drama that had been first performed at Oxford twenty-three years previously.

Handel's only previous revival of *Athalia* had been in 1735, when substantial revision was necessary in order to cover his densely concentrated self-borrowing: much of

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<sup>724</sup> For a summary of the 1755 revisions to *Joseph* and *Theodora*, see Dean: *Ibid.*, pp. 411-2 (*Joseph*) and pp. 574-5 (*Theodora*). *Joseph & His Brethren* had not been performed between 1747 and 1755, although an intended revival was cancelled in 1751 after the death of the Prince of Wales.

<sup>725</sup> Letters dated 22 February 1755 and 11 March 1755, in Burrows & Dunhill: *Op. cit.*, pp. 302-4.

the original Oxford score had been incorporated into *Parnasso in Festa* and the anthem *This is the day* in March 1734 as part of the festivities celebrating the marriage of Princess Anne to the Prince of Orange. The 1735 version was also complicated by Carestini's role in Italian. *Athalia*'s long overdue revival in March 1756 provoked a similarly drastic revision,<sup>726</sup> perhaps because Handel had not been satisfied by the shaky 1735 solution.

The contemporary revision of *Israel in Egypt* was necessary for a similar reason. Handel's first performances of the oratorio in April 1739 had featured a Part 1 adapted from *The ways of Zion do mourn*, the anthem composed for the funeral of Queen Caroline on 17 December 1737. This decision had proved unsatisfactory, perhaps partly because Handel's audience did not respond well to the overwhelming amount of choral music.<sup>727</sup> However, it is also possible that George II was offended by Handel's impulse to capitalise in the theatre from music created for the Queen's funeral. The revised 1756 version of *Israel in Egypt* required a makeshift Part 1 to compensate for the anthem's omission and make the oratorio long enough to fill an evening.<sup>728</sup> Handel's solution - prepared by Smith - was to base the new Part 1 on movements derived from *The Occasional Oratorio*, *Solomon* and the 1751 version of *Esther*.<sup>729</sup>

The necessary revisions of *Athalia* and *Israel in Egypt* resulted in something closer to diverse pasticcios than the admirably structured oratorios that had been first performed during the 1730s. In comparison with his other biblical oratorio revivals during the 1756 season, it is remarkably curious that Handel did little to adapt, alter, or expand his last revival of *Deborah*. The numerous types of alterations required for the long-neglected *Athalia* and the insertions for the restructured *Israel in Egypt* were probably deemed unnecessary for *Deborah*, which had been revived only two years before with most of the

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<sup>726</sup> The conducting score of *Athalia* reveals that Handel planned a revival in 1743, but that this was aborted. Dean suggested that it was 'probably abandoned because of the popular success of *Samson*' (Op. cit., p. 261).

<sup>727</sup> The criticism that *Israel in Egypt* was not appealing was still evident when Mrs Delany wrote on 27 March 1756 that 'it is too solemn for common ears' (*Deutsch*, p. 771). It is not clear whether this was Mrs Delany's own opinion, or a critical remark of those less appreciative.

<sup>728</sup> The only revival of *Israel in Egypt* between 1739 and 1756 was a single performance on 1 April 1740.

<sup>729</sup> 'Hope, a pure and lasting treasure', the English arrangement of the 1735 *Esther* insertion 'Cor fedele'.



same cast.<sup>730</sup> It is also highly probable that the amount of work undertaken for *Athalia* (three performances between 5 and 12 March) and *Israel in Egypt* (17 March) left Smith and Handel disinclined to expend comparable energy on a single performance of *Deborah* (19 March). It seems that audiences were inconsistent in their attendance at performances: on 27 March 1756 Thomas Harris reported that Handel's 'houses have been but indifferent especially in the pitt',<sup>731</sup> but on 10 April he wrote that 'Handel had another crowded house last night at the Messiah.'<sup>732</sup>

Although there was only a single performance of *Deborah* during the 1756 season, there are two different issues of the libretto sharing that date. Dean explored the possible reasons for this,<sup>733</sup> but was unaware of the significance of paper-types in the conducting score. An analysis of M C/258 reveals that the paper-type used for some movements carry the musical content matching a unique wordbook that corresponds to a posthumous revival under J.C. Smith's direction in the 1760s. It appears that this libretto dates from 1766, and that its date on the title page is misprinted 1756.<sup>734</sup> It can be discounted from discussion here. All other known printed librettos dated 1756 are identical, they match the evidence in the conducting score, and they correspond closely to the 1754 libretto.

Compared to the extensive and numerous insertions in the 1757 revival of *Esther* discussed in the previous chapter, Handel - no doubt assisted by Smith - appears to have made minimal changes to *Deborah*. Part 1 was almost identical to the 1754 version, except for two additions: Isabella Young, who sang Barak, was given a new aria 'Hateful man', adapted from a bass aria from *Tolomeo* composed almost thirty years previously;<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>730</sup> The insertion of new material into late 1750s revivals does not seem to have occurred until 1757, when Handel reportedly dictated new music for the revival of *Esther*. This was perhaps an opportunity for increased flexibility that allowed Smith to insert some of his own compositions, and encouraged him to take increasing liberties with the drama and musical score in his oratorio revivals after Handel's death.

<sup>731</sup> Letter to James Harris (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 310).

<sup>732</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>733</sup> Op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>734</sup> Smith's revivals of *Deborah* were in 1764, 1766, 1767 and 1771 (see Eva Zöllner: *English Oratorio after Handel: The London Oratorio Series and its Repertory, 1760-1800*, Appendix A).

<sup>735</sup> The copy of this aria in M C/258 dates from J.C. Smith's revivals after Handel's death, but it is probably a copy of the version inserted for Young in 1756. By this time, Handel was unable to prepare revisions without assistance, so it seems likely that Smith Jr prepared the basic octave transposition of the altered vocal part.

Deborah's 1744a aria 'Cease, O Judah, cease thy Mourning' was reinstated. It seems strange that an extra air was inserted in 1756 for Frasi, who had already sung the role in 1754. Perhaps she sang the aria in both revivals: it could have been omitted from the 1754 libretto by mistake.

Part 2 contained only two alterations in 1756: the Israelite Woman's aria 'No more disconsolate, I'll mourn' and its preceding recitative were cut, but Deborah's recitative 'Barak, we now to battle go' was reinstated (it had been cut in 1744b and 1754). Curiously, Part 3 reverted to its 1733 sequence, with Deborah's 'The glorious sun' returned to its original position, and 'Now sweetly smiling peace descends' reinstated, albeit sung by Deborah instead of the Israelite Woman. Handel compensated Passerini by reinstating the Israelite Woman's air 'Our fears are now for ever fled',<sup>736</sup> which had not been sung since 1735 (probably by Cecilia Young). The aria 'Tyrant, now no more we dread thee' was restored to Jael, and placed back in its original position. Deborah's 1733a recitative 'Jael, if I aright divine' was restored as part of the reversion to the original sequence of arias. It is unusual that a mid-1750s revival contains so much evidence of Handel reinstating and restoring elements of his earliest version, yet the sources confirm that the 1756 version of *Deborah* was in many respects closer to the 1733a concept than any other revival that the composer ever produced in London. The only notable insertion in 1756 was the addition of an overture. A bass part for three movements written on M C/258 f. 1 (recto and verso) is the only overture in any authoritative musical source of *Deborah*, and was composed for the *Occasional Oratorio* a decade earlier. Thus Handel's last version of *Deborah* was possibly the first in which he used an overture.<sup>737</sup>

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<sup>736</sup> As in 1754, the roles of Israelite Woman and Jael were both sung by Passerini. 'Our Fears are now for ever Fled' is not attributed to a character in the 1756 libretto, but Passerini would have sung it.

<sup>737</sup> See Appendix 5a footnote 113.



## Chapter 6 *Handel's Revisions*

### Part One: Ten Kinds of Revision

The four case studies in Chapters 2-5 described how Handel changed aspects of his theatre works. His revision methods can be organized into ten categories that encapsulate his 'revision process' from 1730 until 1757 (and also touch upon his compositional priorities). Examples from the four case studies frequently overlap between categories, but these ten types of revision show which performance solutions were common priorities throughout Handel's career, and also those which were peculiar to isolated circumstances.

#### 1. Shortening Works

The commonest kind of revision in Handel's music theatre works is cutting. This is frequently found in his first revivals of operas, and the 1730b version of *Partenope* contains several examples: the ritornello in Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' was reduced from eighteen bars to only four, but the retention of the original scoring including horns means that it could not have reduced for any reason other than its length. Similarly, Arsace's 'Fatto è amor' and III.ix (including Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma') were cut, although there was no practical reason why they could not have been performed.<sup>738</sup> Handel also removed scenes from his 1734b revival of *Arianna in Creta*, such as II.x, II.xii, and III.ii, although it is likely that some abridgements (Teseo's 'Bella sorge la speranza'; the removal of the sinfonia in I.i) and cuts to recitative were intended as a makeweight measure for the insertion of ballets for Marie Sallé. Handel did not want to make his 1734b version of *Arianna in Creta* shorter, but it was crucial that he did not make it longer.

The trend of shortening the opera's overall musical content increased in later revivals: the 1737 version of *Partenope* features extensive cuts to recitatives throughout

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<sup>738</sup> It is likely that the insertion of 'Seguaci di Cupido' in the *scena ultima* meant that Handel wished to avoid having Senesino sing two arias in close succession.

the opera, with only five short original scenes left undisturbed by abridgements. Also, Handel considerably reduced the length of Act I by removing its last two scenes. Possibly he decided to end Act I with Partenope's 'Io ti levo' because he did not have horns available for Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero', but it is significant that he chose not to insert an alternative aria for Rosmira: Handel preferred shortening to rewriting if the option was available. If he had revived *Arianna in Creta* again in the later 1730s it is probable that similar drastic reduction of recitatives would have occurred. The pattern is common throughout all of his operatic revivals, and, generally, abridgement would increase with the age of the opera.

The overall length of oratorios remained generally consistent across a larger number of years. After an oratorio's first run of performances Handel tended to shorten it slightly for its first revival. The 1733a version of *Esther* was only marginally shortened, but the omission of the Officer's recitative 'Our souls with ardour glow' and the ensuing chorus 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' (I.iii), Esther's 'Tears assist me' and the chorus 'Save us, O Lord' (II.ii), were presumably all made to simplify the work.

The rate of an oratorio's compression would increase more drastically when Handel anticipated unusual performing circumstances. The Oxford version of *Deborah* was substantially compressed, despite its performance in the Sheldonian Theatre occurring only three months after its first run in London. Perhaps the circumstance that the bulk of the London cast had defected to the Opera of the Nobility had some influence on Handel's decisions to fit his long oratorio to a new group of soloists, but it is also likely that the pressure of limited rehearsal time, and the challenge of working in an unfamiliar environment with new musicians, were the main reasons for Handel's cuts. This is also probably true of his 1742 Dublin revival of *Esther*, which was certainly abridged in order to fit the performing forces available.

These patterns invite us to doubt that Handel shortened his works for the sake of his audience's comfort. Any assumption that he was concerned with reducing the duration of a



public entertainment is not supported by solid evidence, and instead contradicts what we know about his preference to try to make things bigger and more elaborate for an audience whenever the chances arose, even for revivals.<sup>739</sup> It is notable that Handel responded affirmatively when opportunities occasionally arose to expand oratorios, such as the elaborate 1744 revision of *Deborah*, and several insertions in *Esther* during the 1750s. Likewise, his Italian operas were occasionally revived in versions that were not shortened, but instead re-evaluated for a new team of performers.<sup>740</sup>

I suspect that Handel frequently made cuts owing to considerations of rehearsal time. It is notable that when a work was revived only a season after its first run, and with predominantly the same cast, it was not shortened much, if compared to performing versions prepared some years later for a different group of soloists. The 1730b *Partenope*, 1733a *Esther*, and 1734b *Arianna in Creta* probably required very little rehearsal time in comparison to an entirely new opera because the most of the singers and orchestral players already knew their parts. In later revivals, the audience's expectation of what constituted an evening's entertainment would not have changed much, and neither would have the general capability of Handel's performers (both vocal and orchestral). He was probably aware of how much time could be allocated to rehearsing revivals, especially during a busy season during which they had to be prepared along with new works and pasticcios.

It cannot be coincidental that the proportion of cuts in music theatre works markedly increased when Handel's rehearsal time was limited, a situation exacerbated when performers had scant familiarity with the score: the 1733b *Deborah* in Oxford, 1737 *Partenope* and 1742 *Esther* in Dublin all support this hypothesis. Although we cannot discount the possibility that Handel wanted to shorten performances for the benefit of an

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<sup>739</sup> Such as the insertion of ballets in his 1734-5 Covent Garden season, the addition of organ concertos after 1735, or Handel's evident eagerness in using big forces for *Deborah* in 1744. However, there is some evidence that Handel took care to estimate the duration of an evening's music drama: his autograph of *Solomon* contains numerous timings and carefully calculated bar counts (RM.20.h.4), and his extension of the final parts of *Samson* and *Jephtha* indicate that he felt both were too short.

<sup>740</sup> For example, the second version of *Radamisto*, the 1725 revival of *Giulio Cesare* incorporating Borosini as Sesto, and arguably the 1731 revival of *Rinaldo*.

audience that was seldom excited by revived old works, the pressure of finding enough time to prepare operas and oratorios adequately must have been a genuine cause of concern to the composer: the busy performance schedule during the 1736-7 season probably meant that he had to cut *Partenope* to shreds simply in order to make it quicker to rehearse, or else its production would not have been viable.<sup>741</sup>

It is noteworthy that Handel used extensive abridgement as a strategy only when necessary. The extent to which he cut material from his London oratorio performances sharply decreased after he ceased producing Italian operas in 1741. Seasons became briefer, runs of performances were much smaller, there was more time to prepare in advance of the season, and there was certainly more spare time within the season to rehearse unstaged concert works. Abbreviation became less a significant feature after the 1730s. Indeed, there was a reversal by the 1750s, when movements cut from *Esther* since 1732-3 were reinstated. Likewise, the bulky revised versions of *Athalia* and *Israel in Egypt* in 1756 indicate that by the end of his career Handel did not wish to reduce the length of his music theatre works. His remarkably un-intrusive plan for *Deborah* in 1754 is almost identical to the 1744b version prepared a decade earlier in some respects, and its final part was fully reinstated for the first time since the oratorio's first run in 1733. This contradicts Dean's complaint that in the mid-1750s Handel was reducing his masterpieces to 'arrant nonsense':

Clearly he could not recapture the original mood, if he even tried. He had lost that sense of context that was one of his supreme gifts, and he does not seem to have cared: he made little or no attempt to produce a convincing whole.<sup>742</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> Moreover, staging it at a different theatre from its original production might have made adaptations necessary.

<sup>742</sup> *Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 92-3.



Perhaps Dean's assessment better relates to works outside the scope of this thesis, but the 1754 *Deborah* is strong evidence that Handel was content to leave the score the same if possible, provided it could be accommodated to his cast.

## 2. Pragmatic Cutting

Some of Handel's revisions to his theatre works imply straightforward pragmatism. In addition to the possible pressures from limited rehearsal time, there were other challenges that arose from performing old works, to which he responded by altering the score.

From time to time his company included an unsuitable singer for whom transposition or alternative arias offered no rescue. The role of Ormonte in *Partenope* had been created for the capable bass Riemschneider, who had presumably known Handel since their childhood together in Halle. After the end of the 1729-30 season the singer returned to the continent, and it is possible that a replacement was sought in some haste. Handel hired the Italian bass Commano, who Dean described as 'a last resort'.<sup>743</sup> The 1730b *Partenope* featured very few cuts, and Ormonte's only aria 'T'appresta forse amore' was probably among them because Commano was incapable of performing it to an adequate standard. The aria is not a vital contribution to the drama, but its reinstatement for Negri in 1737 (in a recomposed version) suggests that Handel only omitted it in 1730b in order to avoid an embarrassingly bad performance.

Some of the revisions made to *Esther* and *Deborah* for their performances at Oxford in July 1733 might have been made to spare the countertenor Walter Powell from wearing his voice out. Powell's performances of music composed for Senesino is a rare example of Handel employing a countertenor to perform a role created by a castrato, and his allocation of music such as Senesino's florid 'Endless fame' and the 'Alleluia' solo in 'The Lord our Enemy has Slain' runs counter to the popular modern belief that eighteenth-century countertenors could not sing operatic coloratura. However, we cannot presume that

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<sup>743</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 130.

singing such Italianate operatic music was second nature to the Oxonian countertenor, who was given a large amount of music to rehearse and perform in the course of only one week. In addition to singing Assuerus and Mordecai in *Esther*, and Barak in *Deborah*, he also premiered the role of Joad in *Athalia*. Although Handel's pruning of the libretto of *Deborah* for Oxford might also have been a conscious effort to tighten up the dramatic narrative, the notable reduction of Barak's role was surely a pragmatic concession to shield Powell from vocal exhaustion.

Anecdotes about Handel's dealings with singers present him as a stubborn and dictatorial character, but he also showed genuine consideration towards singers when it was necessary to protect them from embarrassment. With Durastanti's return to his company for the 1733-4 season, the prospect of having such an experienced singer influenced Handel's composition of the role of Tauride in *Arianna in Creta*. His enthusiasm is indicated by his placement of the extended and brilliant 'Qual leon' at the centre of the opera. However, the removal of the B section and da capo before the first performance implies that during rehearsals it became evident that Durastanti no longer had the stamina to sustain a long heroic-style aria in context.<sup>744</sup> Handel showed compassion for his former prima donna by retaining the semblance of a grand-scale heroic virtuoso aria instead of replacing it with a less exciting alternative. The truncation of 'Qual leon' presented Durastanti in a flattering light without exposing her limitations.

The composer's pragmatism is especially evident in his reduction of *Esther* for Dublin in 1742. The score had to be adjusted for a limited number of soloists, and only the smaller-scale Cannons choruses were retained: both coronation anthems were omitted, and the final chorus was shorn to a brief minimal choral statement. Although Handel might have endeavoured to save rehearsal time, or might have not had the brass players or timpani needed for the music to make its full impact, his avoidance of large-scale choruses indicates that there was not an adequately sized chorus available. His three (or four at

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<sup>744</sup> Perhaps Durastanti was able to sing 'Qual leon' in concert, but not in an opera in which she had several other arias to perform.



most) soloists and a couple of extra hired chorus members might have managed to sing the chamber-style choruses, perhaps on a similar scale to the performance of the 'Cannons' version. Handel sensibly realized that it was ridiculous to attempt *Zadok the Priest* with half-a-dozen singers and an incomplete orchestration. Handel could be an idealist in his refinement of his compositions, but he was prepared to compromise if it was necessary for mounting a performance of an acceptable musical standard.

### **3. Expanding Character Roles**

Handel often increased the prominence of particular characters in revivals. This usually required newly inserted material (whether self-borrowed or newly composed), or the transfer of material from other characters. Samuel Humphreys added a new scene to the beginning of *Esther* in 1732, establishing the beauty, penitence, origin, and newly acquired regal status of the title-heroine. Although not labelled as Esther's coronation in the printed libretto, this scene certainly reads as if the event has recently occurred, and portrays the Israelites as rejoicing that one of their own race is now in an exalted position of direct political influence. Handel's orchestration in 'Breathe soft ye gales' depicts Esther's beauty through its idyllic pastoral shading more than the poetry could suggest alone (it was initially sung by the Israelite Woman, but by Esther herself from 1733), and Mordecai's remark 'With transport, lovely Queen, I see the wonders God hath wrought for thee!' reveals his joy that Esther has become Queen. The impression that this is a recent development is confirmed by the scene's conclusion with the anthem *My heart is inditing*, which Handel had composed for the coronation of Queen Caroline at Westminster Abbey in 1727. The anthem text features a line 'The King shall have Pleasure in thy Beauty', which predicts Assuerus' desire for Esther, with further references to her beauty. Although the considerable length of the anthem is excessive for the end of an opening scene, Humphreys' added libretto texts and Handel's 'new' music represent a considerable dramatic advance on the Cannons version, in which Esther did not appear until the third

scene, and even then without her situation established or explored. Handel's 1732 revision evocatively draws Esther's personality and role from the outset of the drama.

Esther's role was further expanded in 1733a, when Handel transferred 'Breathe soft ye gales', 'Tune your harps', and 'Heaven has lent her every charm' to her, with some texts accordingly changed to the first person. I do not believe this revision was enforced by practical necessity: Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Wright were both available to sing the Israelite Woman's part as it had been created in 1732, and it is notable that the 1733a revision of Esther's role was retained in all subsequent productions that featured Strada. It is possible that the further expansion of Esther's role was primarily influenced by Strada's desire to acquire some of the best soprano music assigned to other singers in 1732, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that Handel consciously desired to improve the title role.

Opera house politics might also have partly influenced Handel to add extra music for Carestini's Teseo in the 1734a version of *Arianna in Creta*. The role was already complete when Carestini arrived in London, which accounted for some necessary transpositions before the opera's first performance. But Teseo's role was also made more prominent and musically varied by the addition of 'Sdegnata sei con me' (I.xi) and the duet 'Mira adesso' (III.vii), the transfer of 'Al fine amore' (II.x), and the repositioned 'Salda quercia' (moved from II.x to II.iii). An argument can be made that these changes were motivated by the singer's ego, and that Handel willingly sought to display Carestini's vocal prowess to better advantage, but it is possible that the composer was also concerned to enhance the opera's musico-dramatic quality.

Accommodating a castrato might also have been a guiding principle behind Handel's expansion of Armindo in the 1737 *Partenope*. It is possible that this was intended to place the castratos Conti and Annibali (who sang Arsace) on a level par politically, but it is equally possible that the composer sought to raise Armindo to the same musical prominence as Arsace dramatically; Armindo is supposed to be the worthy winner of *Partenope*'s hand-in-marriage, but in 1730a he had only three arias. Handel exceeded the



minimum requirement when refitting the role in 1737: he assigned Armindo six arias, which is the same number as Arsace (whose quota is reduced from nine).

The expansion of Sisera's role in both 1744 versions of *Deborah* could have been dramatically motivated. Casting tenor John Beard in a role previously sung by altos required the adaptation of existing material, but Handel also chose to enlarge the role. It is unlikely Handel did this solely in order for Beard to have a more prominent contribution. Beard's roles did not always dominate oratorios in which he performed: his contribution as Mordecai in the 1751 *Esther* was negligible, and even his title-part in *Belshazzar* featured fewer airs than the characters Nictoris, Cyrus and Daniel.

#### 4. Reducing Roles

Handel frequently reduced roles in revivals. This often occurred because a new member of the cast was vocally weaker or ill suited to a role originally performed by a different singer. In the 1734 bilingual *Deborah* the essential role of Sisera was brutally slashed to its bare minimum for Maria Negri. Handel could not have been aesthetically motivated out of concern for dramatic coherence regarding this particular reduction: all of Sisera's recitatives are of fundamental importance in portraying the small episode of conflict and confrontation that occurs in the original 1733a version of *Deborah*; Dean suggested that Sisera is the only character in the oratorio who 'shows a spark of nobility'.<sup>745</sup> The role of the sceptical and powerful Captain of the Canaanite army is already limited in 1733a compared to the potential scope of the role. In 1734, Handel had to cast Maria Negri as Sisera, which seems to have been a mistake from an artistic point of view. Without any recitatives, and only singing two arias with Italian texts that lack explanations of motivation and context, Sisera is deprived of all his best lines in 1734. Instead of taunting, boasting, defying and mocking the pious Israelites with unbridled sarcasm, the Canaanite's role is decimated in the 1734 version long before he even arrives in Jael's tent. It is not far-

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<sup>745</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

fetches to suggest that in this version of the oratorio Sisera falls ignobly by the composer's hand.<sup>746</sup> Later the same year, the spirited villain Tauride was similarly weakened and ruined by its adaptation for Maria Negri in the 1734b *Arianna in Creta*. Negri's role as Polinesso in the original run of *Ariodante* (1734-5 season) suggests that she could play compelling villainous male roles, but this part was composed especially for her. Handel's adaptations of existing parts for her seem to have been less successful.

The reduction of a role could be unconnected with the quality of its new performer. John Beard made his operatic debut for Handel in 1734, when he was already an experienced singer owing to his training at the Chapel Royal. By 1736 his theatre career had flourished under Handel's supervision, including prominent roles in *Ariodante*, *Alcina*, *Atalanta* and *Alexander's Feast*. During the 1736-7 season he performed dramatically important and vocally demanding roles in the new operas *Giustino*, *Arminio* and *Berenice*. However, Beard's contribution as Emilio in the contemporary 1737 *Partenope* was substantially reduced. Handel did not minimize Beard's part because the tenor was an incapable or insignificant member of the cast; the removal of the important soliloquy rage-lament 'Barbaro fato, sì' and 'La speme ti consoli' (which shows Emilio having turned over a new leaf) were after-effects of Handel's allocating them to Armindo. It was undoubtedly a rushed and poorly considered solution, although Handel at least raised Beard's quota from one to two arias with the reinstatement of 'La gloria in nobil alma'.

Over the next few decades Beard sang plenty of principal roles for Handel, including the extensive lead role in *Samson* (first performed in 1743), but his contribution as Mordecai was remarkably minimal in the 1751 *Esther*. Mordecai is an essential character in the biblical story, but was already poorly served by the 1732 libretto, and the diminishing role in 1751 further weakens his contribution. The omission of Mordecai's contribution in the oratorio's shortened opening scene, including the excision of 'So much

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<sup>746</sup> Sisera's arias 'A miei piedi' and 'Benche vanti gran portenti' are all that remain of his role in 1734. Both Italian texts adequately translate the meaning of Humphreys' verses, although the failure to mention that Sisera's anger comes from what he perceives as 'sighted mercy' makes the Italian version of 'At my Feet extended low' less effective.



beauty' and the suppression of his first communication with his niece Esther, created some space for Handel to insert music elsewhere, including some effective reuse of material from *Solomon* for the new role of 'Priest Israelite' created especially for the tenor Thomas Lowe.

### 5. Adapting to Voice Types

The distribution of voice types in casts of Handel's revivals was seldom a perfect match to the original first cast for whom the music was designed. It was common for a character in an opera or oratorio to be composed for one kind of voice (e.g. soprano castrato) and assigned to an entirely different type (e.g. tenor) in a later performing version. In order to adapt that character's part to fit a dissimilar voice, Handel's revision methods included transposition and rearrangement of existing music, and the insertion of newly composed or self-borrowed material.

The role of Alceste in *Arianna in Creta* was originally composed for and performed by the soprano castrato Carlo Scalzi, but when the opera was revived in November 1734 there was no equivalent voice available. Handel instead gave the part to his new tenor John Beard, who had only recently made his stage debut in a revival of *Il pastor fido*. Two of Alceste's four 1734a arias were retained, with the vocal parts probably transposed down an octave,<sup>747</sup> but Handel clearly did not consider that to be a feasible treatment for an entire role. Some music was impossible to adapt for Beard's tenor: 'Son qual stanco son pellegrino', with its plaintive cello solo part in counterpoint to the high vocal line, would have been impractical because octave transposition of the vocal part would have caused the two lines to overlap in pitch and lose their effectiveness. Regrettably, this scene was cut despite being one of Alceste's most important contributions, and a vital part of the subplot concerning his love relationship with Carilda. Likewise, Scalzi's 'Par che voglia' was not deemed suitable for Beard in octave transposition, and was omitted. However, in this

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<sup>747</sup> 'Tal' or d'oscuro velo' and 'Non hà difesa'.

instance Handel compensated Alceste for the cut with the insertion of an appropriately virile tenor aria ('D'instabile fortuna' from *Lotario*, given the parody text 'D'instabile Cupido').

Two years later, Beard was assigned the leading male role in the first entirely English version of *Esther* since 1733. The role of Assuerus had been composed for Senesino four years previously, but much of this role had been adapted for the alto castrato from music that Handel had composed for tenor in his original Cannons version of the oratorio. Assuerus' vocal part in the duet 'Who calls my parting soul from death' had been rewritten to fit within the compass of Senesino's voice, but Beard presumably sang the original Cannons tenor part. 'O beauteous Queen' and 'How can I stay when love invites' had both been transposed up for Senesino in 1732, and both were restored to their original Cannons key for Beard in 1736. This was not so much revision of a role as reversion to the original composition. The two pieces created specifically for Senesino in 1732 were adapted for Beard, although simple octave transposition was clearly not possible when revising music with an alto vocal range for a tenor. The orchestral parts of 'Endless fame' were transposed up from E flat to G, and only then could the vocal part be sung an octave lower (perhaps with subtle rewriting in order to avoid unwelcome harmonic clashes in this tessitura). 'Thro' the nation' would also have been transposed for Beard (it certainly was in 1751, presumably following a precedent set in 1736 and 1740), but this solution seems less satisfactory owing to its direct transition into the following chorus 'All applauding crowds', which was not transposed. Handel repeated the tenor solution for the role of Assuerus for Beard in 1740 and 1757, but he reverted to the 1732 castrato version when an appropriate castrato (Guadagni) was available in 1751, in preference to Beard.

Although transposition was common in Handel's revivals, it seems that the octave transposition of vocal parts was confined to arias where the practice could work without causing disruption to the polyphonic layout of the voice's relationship with the orchestra. When the bass role of Ormonte was sung by the alto Maria Negri in the 1737 *Partenope*, it



was not desirable to have a higher voice doubling the basso continuo line in the style Handel normally associated with bass voices, so Handel carefully recomposed the vocal part in 'T'appresta forse amore' so that it would work better for an alto voice, especially in its relationship with the orchestral parts, than it would have had in upward octave transposition. It was also an opportunity to create a slightly more florid vocal part better suited to Negri's voice. Handel also gave Ormonte an extra aria in 1737, with a parody text version of 'Furibondo spira il vento'. There were probably two reasons for this decision, neither of them musico-dramatic: the addition of a second aria to Ormonte's part would have better satisfied Negri (who was used to performing larger roles), and Handel was making good use of excellent music that would otherwise have gone to waste.<sup>748</sup>

Transferring appropriate music from old sources to a revised role in a different work was a prominent resource in Handel's preparation of the 1744 versions of *Deborah*. The adaptation of the alto role of Sisera for Beard is a further testament of the English tenor's flexibility and usefulness to Handel, who used music from *Athalia* to flesh out Beard's contribution (in addition to rewriting the vocal part in Sisera's existing arias). The addition of Mrs Cibber to Handel's company in 1744 was of equal importance to his redesign of *Deborah*. This gave him a chance to increase the prominence and proportionate contribution of Jael, the crucial dramatic character who assassinates the Canaanite military leader Sisera. In the 1744a version of the oratorio, Handel took most of Mrs Cibber's music from *Esther* and *Athalia*, no doubt because he preferred to find old music that could be inserted to fit the alto Mrs Cibber than to adapt the existing soprano role or compose it anew. However, it is strange that he chose to transpose a parody text version of a soprano air from *Esther* ('Flatt'ring tongue' → 'Flowing joys do now surround me'). If Handel needed to transpose and adapt music from soprano to alto voice, it is peculiar he did not persist with Jael's more pertinent musical statement 'To Joy he brightens my Despair'. In the 1744b alternative version of *Deborah*, he resolved this problem by transposing Jael's

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<sup>748</sup> Handel had probably already cut Arsace's aria from the end of Act II as part of his levelling of Arsace and Armindo to the same musical prominence.

original aria down a fifth. Although retrenchment of Jael's role back to its 1733a text might have been enforced by uncertainties over Mrs Cibber's vocal condition, it is difficult to believe that the removal of the problematic *Esther* insertion was coincidental.

## 6. Changing Castratos

Handel's leading male characters in his operas and early oratorios in London were predominantly Italian castratos, usually alto or mezzo-soprano in range. During the Second Academy period there was a higher turnover of leading men than at any other time during Handel's London career. Bernacchi (1729-30 only) was succeeded by Senesino (1730-33), who was in turn replaced by Carestini (1733-5). Carestini was replaced in the short-term by Conti (from the end of the 1735-6 season until 1737), but more fully by Annibali (who sang all of the *primo uomo* parts during the 1736-7 season). Although Handel could usually call upon the services of a first-class castrato in revivals during the 1730s, he could seldom leave the existing music unadjusted when a new singer was involved.

The role of Arsace, tailor-made for Bernacchi in *Partenope*, did not fit Senesino's voice comfortably, despite both singers possessing a similar range and tessitura. Four of Bernacchi's arias were lowered by a tone for Senesino. 'Fatto è amor' was cut; its taxing coloratura and indignant outburst might have suited Senesino, but Handel omitted it to facilitate the insertion of a new aria for Arsace in the *scena ultima* ('Seguaci di Cupido'). In 1737 Annibali evidently felt more comfortable with music in Bernacchi's original keys, although he retained Senesino's additional aria. The removal of three arias from Arsace in 1737 was probably not caused by any deficiency on Annibali's part, but more plausibly by rehearsal time constraints and Handel's desire to place Conti's Armindo on a more equal dramatic footing.

Replacing Senesino proved to be more problematic in revivals of *Esther* and *Deborah*. At least some of his music had to be transposed up for Carestini in the 1734



*Deborah*,<sup>749</sup> but Carestini was not expected to sing much, if at all, in English. All of Barak's 1733 music that was retained in 1734 received parody Italian texts. Handel decided upon a different solution for the 1735 *Esther*, and instead created new insertions tailor-made for Carestini; it is uncertain how much of Senesino's 1732 English music was retained in 1735, but a parody Italian text was certainly used for 'Endless fame' ('Quella fama'). It is possible that by spring 1735 Carestini was better equipped to tackle at least a few short lines in English. The redesigned version of Assuerus's role in Italian was certainly kept for Annibali in the 1737 *Esther*, but some of the music was reassigned to Conti's 'Israelite', and transposed up for him.

Such situations did not always pose extensive musical problems. Handel experienced much less trouble incorporating Guadagni in the 1751 *Esther*: the last famous castrato with whom Handel worked sang the version of Assuerus' role that had been prepared for Senesino nineteen years earlier, without transpositions, Italian parody texts, or new insertions.<sup>750</sup>

## 7. Involving Italians in Oratorios

During the 1730s Handel's oratorio performances were an extension to the activities of his opera company. Whilst working under these conditions, Handel needed to invent ways to involve his Italian opera singers in English oratorios. For the first versions of *Esther* and *Deborah* Strada, Senesino, Bertolli and Montagnana sang in English, and the remaining roles were taken by English singers.<sup>751</sup> Handel's additions to *Esther* in 1732 included increased opportunities for operatic coloratura for the leading couple ('Endless fame' for

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<sup>749</sup> Only one aria was certainly transposed upwards for Carestini: 'How blooming if the lovely Fair' ('Più bella spoglia sarà fral').

<sup>750</sup> Likewise, it seems that problems seldom occurred when Handel assigned old soprano roles to new prima donnas who were acceptably bilingual: Francesina (in the 1740s) and Frasi (in the 1750s) both sang Strada's original versions of the title roles in *Esther* and *Deborah* without substantial changes.

<sup>751</sup> It is likely that assistance was offered to Italian soloists who agreed to sing in English. A soprano choral part for *My heart is inditing* (New York Public Library, JOD 72-25) contains phonetic annotations that attempt to guide an Italian singer how to pronounce the English text. It appears from its paper-type and a cue to the preceding recitative that this part was copied for *Esther* in 1732 (Burrows: 'Handel's 1738 "Oratorio": A Benefit Pasticcio', pp. 22-4).

Senesino, and most notably the long ‘Alleluia’ for Strada). Not everybody was convinced that this approach to involving Italian opera singers in English music drama had worked. The pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* reported: ‘Senesino and Bertolli made rare work with the English Tongue you would have sworn it had been Welch; I would have wish’d it Italian, that they might have sung with more ease to themselves’.<sup>752</sup> Handel soon shared this point of view.<sup>753</sup> He trusted that the same company of singers would cope with the English libretto in *Deborah*, and probably envisaged *Athalia* for them too, but after his company of singers changed in summer 1733 he demonstrated a flexible attitude towards Italians who were uncomfortable about singing English texts. He adopted two different kinds of solution: Italian parody texts of the original English music, or wholesale insertions of operatic-style music on a grand scale.

The former approach was used for a revival of *Deborah* at the King’s Theatre in April 1734. This featured no new insertions, and almost all the drastic abridgement prepared for Oxford (1733b) was retained. However, the composer made a fresh set of cuts, most of which alleviated the burden on the Italian singers Carestini, Scalzi and Maria Negri. Handel modelled Carestini’s role entirely upon Senesino’s original music, translated into Italian. A comparison between Humphreys’ original 1733a English texts and a literal translation of the anonymous 1734 Italian texts reveals that the Italian poetry seems clumsy and poorly constructed.<sup>754</sup> This invites speculation that these texts were not written by an experienced author with a reasonable knowledge of literary Italian, so it is unlikely that the opera company’s Italian secretary or the (presumably) fluent Italian-speaking Handel were responsible. The task of providing texts that are almost all direct parodies of the original verses certainly required somebody with an adequate understanding of English, which rules out Carestini or any of the Italian singers for whom performance in English was

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<sup>752</sup> *Deutsch*, pp. 300-1.

<sup>753</sup> Handel had already attempted to mix Italian and English texts in the 1732 revival of *Acis and Galatea*.

<sup>754</sup> See Appendix 5d.



untenable. Perhaps other Italian singers or members of the Haymarket opera orchestra could have produced the texts.

The adjustments enforced by the accommodation of Italian parody texts render the 1734 *Deborah* a chaotic mess. The wholesale removal of material and the damaging reductions to the roles of Abinoam and Jael were expedient in order to place Carestini, Scalzi and Maria Negri distant enough from the English texts surrounding their contributions, but left the plot – as sung – in tatters.<sup>755</sup> The fact that Handel did not repeat this method of incorporating Italian texts onto existing English music indicates that he felt dissatisfied with the effort it took, and regretted the problems it caused in both preparation and performance. It is also plausible that the method of Italian parody adaptation had not satisfied Carestini. It is telling that Handel avoided using the method in the bilingual versions of *Esther* and *Athalia* at Covent Garden in 1735. Instead, he inserted extravagant new Italian scenes for Carestini. Furthermore, the addition of Italian texts for Strada in her two duets with Carestini makes it apparent that the composer did not want singers to perform in English and Italian together.

I doubt that Handel decided upon the method of inserting new music for Carestini because it was convenient or quick. He could have provided parody Italian texts for the entire role of Assuerus, but this was only done for one aria. There can be little doubt that Handel wished to display Carestini's talent as ostentatiously as possible. Rather than make another apologetic bilingual version like the 1734 *Deborah*, Carestini's role in the 1735 version of *Esther* was an attempt to present the castrato's contribution as an artistic virtue, at least from the perspective of providing a splendidly diverse musical concert to rival Farinelli at the Opera of the Nobility.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> The full English text of the 1733 libretto was still sold to the audience in 1734, so any gaps in the plot would have been at least resolved in print.

<sup>756</sup> There remains some doubt concerning how, or if, Carestini sang the English music essential to the role of Assuerus. It is possible that he might have sung some short recitatives and the duet 'Who calls my parting soul from death' in English. Burrows doubted that Carestini performed in character during the 1735 bilingual performances of *Athalia*, and observed that his only clear contribution as the leading male role Joad was the duet 'Cease thy anguish', given the Italian text 'Cangia in gioia'. Burrows speculated that perhaps 'another singer took the (now small) dramatic role of Joad. The contralto Rosa Negri could have fulfilled this fairly

## 8. Avoiding Controversy

It is possible that Handel sometimes modified his works if there was a risk of political controversy. In 1732 Handel's advanced composition draft of *Fernando* was renamed *Sosarme*, with the location and almost all character names changed. It is inconceivable that Handel went to such effort merely on an artistic whim, or because he liked the sound of the new title and character names better. Dean assessed that the reason for Handel's revision was 'almost certainly political':

King John V of Portugal, who reigned from 1706 to 1750, was the richest ruler in Europe, thanks to the mineral wealth of Brazil, and a man of excessive punctilio in matters of status [...] The Portuguese were Britain's oldest allies. A libretto that presented them in a most unflattering light, their king engaged in an undignified civil war with his son and requiring to be rescued by his neighbour of Castile, might well cause apprehension at the court of George II. Handel was not a political animal; it seems likely that his attention was drawn at a late stage to the risks of offending a friendly but touchy ruler and that this explains the abrupt translation of the story from the Iberian peninsula to a remote Sardis.<sup>757</sup>

There is only one potential example within the scope of this thesis where Handel might have used the revision process to suppress an unwelcome connotation. Samuel Humphrey's parody text for *Zadok the Priest* in the expanded 1732 version of *Esther* might have caused some political controversy: 'God is our hope, and will cause the King to shew mercy to Jacob's race'. As demonstrated previously, some listeners interpreted the reference to 'Jacob's race' as a Jacobite slogan, but other members of Handel's audience

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undemanding duty [...] In any case, during the 1734-5 season Handel had a number of spare singers in his company at Covent Garden who joined in the chorus movements'. Burrows suggested that 'Carestini's role was ornamental rather than dramatic' ('Handel's 1735 (London) Version of *Athalia*', p. 212). It is possible that Carestini's apparent avoidance of English in *Athalia* (1-12 April 1735) was the consequence of a brief failed experiment with some small English contributions to *Deborah* (1734) and *Esther* (5-21 March 1735).

<sup>757</sup> Dean: 'Sosarme: A Puzzle Opera' in *Essays on Opera*, p. 51.



could have regarded Humphreys' text as an acceptable and conventional biblical reference.<sup>758</sup> Jacob, renamed Israel by Jehovah, was the progenitor of the twelve tribes. Humphreys' use of the literary allusion to 'Jacob's race' is a perfectly accurate and dramatically relevant description of the Israelites.<sup>759</sup>

It seems that Handel used 'God is our hope' in performances of *Esther* between 1732 and 1737, but it is unlikely that it was afterwards abandoned because he had become aware of its politically insensitive connotation. The removal of 'Jacob's race' from the text in favour of the safer alternative parody text 'Blessed are all they that fear the Lord' in *Esther* from 1740 has a mundane explanation: 'Blessed are all they that fear the Lord' was used in 1738 for Handel's 'Benefit' oratorio, a pasticcio concert in which words relevant to the plot of *Esther* did not fit the anthem's context. Afterwards, Handel might have retained 'Blessed are they' for no reason other than convenience.

### 9. Self-Borrowing of Music

One of Handel's most frequent revision methods (and compositional techniques) involved the re-use of music from his old works. We cannot assume that he borrowed music because it accelerated his rate of production, or saved him creative effort. According to Burrows, Handel's revision of the anthem *I will magnify thee* for the Chapel Royal (HWV 250b, c. 1724) is a clear demonstration that 'the amount of work involved was surely greater than that which would have resulted from beginning the composition again.'<sup>760</sup> The composer often re-used music because it had not been heard in public in London before, and perhaps he believed the music deserved a new lease of life. Also, his choice of self-borrowings was usually based on rhetorical or dramatically apposite qualities in his old compositions that suited new contexts.

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<sup>758</sup> Furthermore, its allegedly scandalous nature is somewhat diminished by an observation that George II owed his position on the British throne to his Stuart descent.

<sup>759</sup> This literary allusion is by no means uncommon in Handel's works. It was prominently used for 'Hear Jacob's God' in *Samson*, which was first performed three years after the reference was abandoned in *Esther*.

<sup>760</sup> *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 221.

When composing *Partenope*, Handel chose to develop musical ideas evident in two cantatas that he had composed in Italy. The opening part of *Tra le fiamme* (HWV 170) was recomposed for Partenope's 'Qual farfalletta', and Emilio's 'Barbaro fato, sì' was modelled on a ritornello Handel had last used in *Arresta il passo* (HWV 83). Both self-borrowings have consistent dramatic connotations. In 'Qual farfalletta' Partenope describes her loyalty to Arsace despite her affection for Armindo, and compares herself to a butterfly fluttering round the fatal light.<sup>761</sup> This text is very similar to that in Handel's Roman cantata, which describes how love can be like a dangerous flame that burns the helpless lover. His later version of the music is subtler and more harmonically developed, with sustained eloquent lines moving in unpredictable directions that represent her inner uncertainty, enigmatic personality, and perhaps her growing fondness of the steadfast Armindo.<sup>762</sup>

Likewise, the ritornello of Emilio's bitter soliloquy 'Barbaro fato, sì' shares common ground with its earlier use in *Arresta il passo*, in which the singer is intensely frustrated and feels the pain of thwarted love. In the earlier context, Handel's music is used to introduce texts that imply a character's optimism that their suffering in love will eventually be happily resolved.<sup>763</sup> In *Partenope* the music is used to portray deeper and more complicated emotions: Emilio has been defeated in the battle, lost his prized honour, so that in addition to expressing his torment in love, Emilio also feels shame and anger. The unprecedented mixture of conflicting emotions associated with this ritornello idea,

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<sup>761</sup> Handel was initially inspired to choose this musical self-borrowing for Emilio (II.v), whose recitative uses the same simile. Dean considered that Emilio's version of the B section text was 'abject' (*Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 164), and that the aria was transferred from Emilio in order to make him a 'more virile counterweight' (p. 160, fn 17). I am unconvinced by this suggestion because Emilio's Act III arias both present a more generous side to his character. Handel probably reconsidered the effectiveness of 'Qual farfalletta' in its first position for Emilio because it prolonged his exit and prevented the dramatic focus from being on Rosmira's 'Furie son dell'alma mia'. Two arias in one scene might have been one too many in this instance, especially with 'Qual farfalletta' being a more lyrical and longer aria than Rosmira's. However, two scenes later 'Qual farfalletta' works perfectly for Partenope, and plants an element of doubt in her relationship with Arsace.

<sup>762</sup> This is not explicitly clarified in the libretto text, where it appears that Partenope remains loyal to Arsace. However, the placement of the aria in response to Armindo, its musical tone, and the ambiguity of its imagery make Partenope's growing feelings for Armindo transparent in performance.

<sup>763</sup> This is also true of the ritornello's earlier appearance in the Hamburg opera *Almira*.



arguably arising from a superior libretto text, inspired Handel to reinvent the music in a version that comfortably surpasses its earlier sources.

Self-borrowing was a prominent revision process in Handel's preparation of *Esther* in 1732,<sup>764</sup> although the original Cannons version was also shaped by this method. Several crucial moments in the original score were self-borrowings from the *Brockes Passion*. These seem to have been preserved throughout all his subsequent versions of *Esther*, which suggests that Handel was pleased with the artistic suitability of the music. A key moment in the oratorio is the throne-room scene (II.iii), during which Esther enters the throne room but is afraid that her direct approach to the king will be punished by death; Assuerus recognizes and reassures her. This episode, taken from the Apocrypha rather than the Old Testament, required Handel to provide something special, and the music he used for the duet 'Who calls my parting soul from death' was modeled on the farewell scene between the dying Jesus and his grieving mother Mary in the *Brockes Passion*. In each version, despite the wide difference in scriptural context, the duet portrays a soprano's fears being sensitively assuaged by the male character. The gravity and tragedy that Handel communicated in his *Brockes Passion* music creates a comparable moment of emotional potency in *Esther*.

Another self-borrowing from the *Brockes Passion* inspired one of Handel's subtlest moments of characterization in *Esther*. Haman's reaction to the King's discovery of his treachery is so apparently modest that one is momentarily tricked into feeling sympathy for him prior to his being sent to the gallows.<sup>765</sup> 'Turn not, o Queen, thy face away' is based on music Handel originally conceived to portray Christ's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane ('Mein Vater'). Placing the atoning pain of Christ into the mouth of a villain obsessed with genocide seems bizarrely incongruous, but Handel's choice of self-

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<sup>764</sup> Full details in Appendix 3a.

<sup>765</sup> Haman's penitence seems entirely convincing. Handel often created an illusion of sympathy for the villain in his music theatre works, such as the bewildered Grimoaldo (*Rodelinda*) and the heartbroken Alcina. Esther is not fooled into sympathy: her barbed response 'Flatt'ring tongue, no more I'll hear thee' reminds us that Haman cannot be trusted and deserves condemnation.

borrowing was stimulated by a contextual parallel: both men are to suffer a fate which they suspect cannot be avoided, and each is pleading for his life. Christ is asking that the 'bitter cup' be removed from him; Haman, recognizing that the source of power now rests firmly with the Queen, begs Esther for mercy. Handel clearly associated this music with imploring penitence.

For the 1732 revision of the score Handel chose to borrow from sources that were unfamiliar to the majority of his audience. Handel based the oratorio's new opening number 'Breathe soft ye gales' on a finely crafted arioso from the soprano motet *Silete venti* (HWV 242), which must have been composed at some time between 1724 and 1732.<sup>766</sup> Perhaps its commission originated during Handel's trip to Italy to recruit singers in 1729.<sup>767</sup> It seems that *Silete venti* had never been performed publicly in London, which made it ripe for Handel to exploit in his revision of *Esther*. Once again, the source from which he borrowed has textual associations with its new context.<sup>768</sup> In the motet version, an increasingly tempestuous sinfonia is interrupted by a soprano, who orders the forceful storm to be 'Be silent', and for the leaves to 'rustle no more', after which a ravishing arioso explains that the storm must abate because the singer's soul 'reposes in sweet bliss'. In 1732 the Israelite Woman is not required to order any tempest to abate, and instead focuses exclusively on reposing in sweet bliss.<sup>769</sup> Handel, replacing the stormy sinfonia with a new gentle pastoral introduction, illustrated the soft breezes mentioned in Humphreys' text with a gorgeous orchestration featuring two recorders, two oboes, two bassoons, five-part violins, violas, cellos, double basses, fully figured organ, and

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<sup>766</sup> The autograph manuscript (British Library, RM.20.g.9) has been trimmed slightly, and the part of the paper where Handel customarily signed and dated his works is lost. The paper-type indicates it could not have been composed before the 1724 (Burrows & Ronish: *A Catalogue of Handel's Musical Autographs*, p. 185). Burrows suggested a date of circa 1724 (*Handel*, p. 425). Graydon Beeks agrees with this date, and proposed that 'it may have been written in London for Cardinal Colonna in Rome' ('Handel's Sacred Music' in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, p. 165)

<sup>767</sup> Handel's allocation of 'Breathe soft ye gales' to Mrs Robinson in 1732 raises doubt that *Silete venti* was composed for Strada.

<sup>768</sup> Of course, this might have been an entirely deliberate technique on the part of Samuel Humphreys, perhaps acting under Handel's orders.

<sup>769</sup> This impression would certainly be enhanced if appoggiaturas are included in places where they are implied, such as 'soft' (bar 10) and 'roll!' (bar 13).



arpeggiating harpsichord, theorbo and harp.<sup>770</sup> He had not attempted such an evocative and unusual use of the orchestra since Cleopatra's Parnassus scene in *Giulio Cesare*.

The next movement in the 1732 revision of *Esther* was also a self-borrowed addition. 'Watchful angels' is based on Mary Magdalene's 'Ferma l'ali' from *La Resurrezione* (Rome, 1708). Mary Magdalene's mournful determination to sustain her personal sorrow without the inconvenient interruption of sleep is transformed by Handel into an Israelite's serene wish for protection from adversity. The 1708 and 1732 contexts for this music may seem incongruous, but there is a common thread of unease, and both women's texts read like fervent prayers: 'Ferma l'ali' is a grief-stricken lament that begs for an avoidance of sleep, and 'Watchful angels' is an equally sincere plea for protection. Handel generates a sense of disturbance and tension sustained in the music for over a minute before the pedal bass G eventually resolves at bar 40, which creates a peculiarly emotional mood of intensified yearning and religious ecstasy. The musical imagery supports both dramatic contexts, although perhaps the difference between imploring grief and prayerful hope accounted for Handel's removal of the 1708 recorder parts.<sup>771</sup> However, Handel's choice of self-borrowing again suggests that dramatic echoes stimulated his choices.

For the new duet 'Blessings descend on downy wings' (*Esther*, 1732), Handel turned to one of his earliest compositions set to an English text. He had composed the birthday ode *Eternal source of light divine* for Queen Anne nineteen years earlier, after he had been in England for only a short period. Once again, there is contextual connection here between the source and borrowing: 'Kind health descends on downy wings' (1713) was created to praise a living temporal Queen (in poor health) rather than a biblical Queen (known for her youthful beauty), but in each context Handel's music elegantly addresses a

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<sup>770</sup> Dean rightly judged that 'Breathe soft ye gales' is 'By far the finest of the fresh numbers' added to *Esther* in 1732, and described it as 'an imaginative piece of tone painting' and 'an example of the sensuous beauty Handel could create through instrumental colour and spacing alone' (*Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 208).

<sup>771</sup> Handel used recorders in music evoking lamentation, even in lyrical pastoral music such as 'Heart, the seat of soft delight' in *Acis and Galatea*.

Queen. Furthermore, it is a ravishingly beautiful duet that appropriately strengthens the emotional ties between the Israelites who are undergoing persecution together. ‘Blessings descend’ is a notably successful self-borrowing that fitted its new theatrical context without the need for significant alteration.<sup>772</sup>

These examples suggest that Handel was not unoriginal or lazy, but that he evidently associated some musical ideas with particular psychological reactions or rhetorical dramatic meanings. However, his oratorio performances during the early 1730s reveal that once he found a suitable resource for self-borrowing he continued to exploit it as much as possible. For example, his self-borrowing from *Silete venti* intensified in his 1735 performances of *Esther*. The addition of several Italian insertions for Carestini and the Organ Concerto in B flat, Op. 4 No. 2 (HWV 290), created a curious network of connected borrowings between *Esther*, *Silete venti* and the Trio Sonata in B flat, Op. 2 No. 3 (HWV 388):

Trio sonata HWV 388 c. 1718	<i>Esther</i> HWV 50a, Cannons c. 1718	<i>Silete venti</i> HWV 242 c. 1724?	<i>Esther</i> HWV 50b 1732	<i>Esther</i> Revision 1735
1 <sup>st</sup> movement	→ Overture, 1 <sup>st</sup> movement		Overture, 1 <sup>st</sup> movement	Overture, 1 <sup>st</sup> movement
1 <sup>st</sup> movement		→ ‘Date certa ... surgant venti’		→ ‘Bianco giglio ... spira un aura’
3 <sup>rd</sup> movement	→ Overture, 2 <sup>nd</sup> movement		Overture, 2 <sup>nd</sup> movement	Overture, 2nd movement
2 <sup>nd</sup> movement	→ Overture, 3 <sup>rd</sup> movement		Overture, 3 <sup>rd</sup> movement	Overture, 3 <sup>rd</sup> movement
4 <sup>th</sup> movement				→ Organ Concerto Op. 4 No. 2 in B flat (HWV 290), 2 <sup>nd</sup> movement
		Sinfonia		→ Organ Concerto Op. 4 No. 2 in B flat, 1 <sup>st</sup> movement
		‘Silete venti’	→ ‘Breathe soft ye gales’	‘Breathe soft ye gales’
		‘Dulcis amor’		→ ‘Cor fedele’
		‘Alleluia’ (from <i>Saeviat tellus</i> )	‘Alleluia’	‘Alleluia’

The composition date of Op. 2 No. 3 is not known, but is assumed to be around 1718 owing to the sonata’s relationship with the overture in the Cannons *Esther*. Handel borrowed from the same sonata for ‘Date certa’ in *Silete venti* at some point before 1732,

<sup>772</sup> Burrows observed that several of Handel’s borrowings from the ode in his early 1730s oratorios ‘proved very successful in their new contexts’ (*Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, p. 109).



and in 1735 it was recycled as 'Bianco giglio'. The motet and trio sonata each provided source material for Handel to create movements of a new organ concerto (HWV 290), which was also written for the 1735 performances of *Esther*.<sup>773</sup> Thus we can observe that each of the five movements in *Silete venti* were deployed in the 1735 performances of *Esther* in some fashion (two of them already created in 1732, and one of them in an orchestral form divorced from a vocal context in 1735). Also, we can identify that significant portions of the motet were already borrowed from the same trio sonata that shared musical material with the oratorio about seventeen years earlier.

This complex cycle of self-borrowings confirms that Handel used a systematic process across nearly two decades. His artistic motivation for the chain of musical relationships cannot be explained, but the creative relationship summarized above cannot be coincidental. The most obvious reason why he borrowed from *Silete venti* both in 1732 and 1735 was the consistently impressive musical quality of the motet, which lent itself comfortably to theatrical use; it had never been performed in public, and it was a useful source for Italianate additions for Carestini.

Handel continued to borrow extensively from his previous music in his preparation of *Deborah* in 1733.<sup>774</sup> Dean judged that 'It does not follow that a borrowed piece will not be fused with its new context, but in *Deborah* this seldom happens. With a few notable exceptions, [...] the movements, new as well as old, remain detached and detachable.'<sup>775</sup> Dean's opinion is overstated. Many of Handel's self-borrowings work well in their new contexts. The Chandos anthem *O praise the Lord with one consent* provided highly effective material for the imposing grand opening chorus 'Immortal Lord of Earth and

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<sup>773</sup> The organ concertos were played between the Acts, probably after an interval and before the next Act commenced, but possibly as an interlude in its own right. In 1735, Handel played Op. 4 No. 2 (HWV 290) and Op. 4 No. 3 in G minor (HWV 291). Burrows noted that 'This was almost certainly the first time that he had introduced organ concertos into his London oratorio performances' ('Handel's 1735 (London) version of *Athalia*', p. 195). It is not known if these were the concertos that Handel always performed in later performances of *Esther*, and it is possible that other concertos were used in later revivals. For a summary of the available information on Handel's use of organ concertos in performances of *Esther*, see Stanley Sadie: *Handel Concertos*, pp. 25-7.

<sup>774</sup> Full details of self-borrowings in *Deborah* are in Appendix 5a.

<sup>775</sup> *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 230.

Skies', and was also the source of suitably robust swaggering music for Abinoam's call to arms in 'Awake the ardour of thy breast'.<sup>776</sup> The music from another Chandos anthem, *The Lord is my light*, for Abinoam's 'Tears, such as tender fathers shed', produced a remarkably subtle dramatic impression: instead of Abinoam appearing excited at the prospect of bloodshed, he offers a touching expression of paternal love.<sup>777</sup>

Old works composed in Italy were a useful resource for Handel in *Deborah*. The opening section of the psalm-setting *Dixit Dominus* was adapted for the chorus 'See the proud chief', with the earlier Roman music serving as the Israelites' menacing warning of the advancing villain Sisera. *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* provided music for Abinoam's 'Swift Inundation', in which Abinoam's enthusiasm for battle is communicated through music originally created to depict Polifemo's grotesque personality.<sup>778</sup> Handel borrowed several pieces from the *Brockes Passion*: the Daughter of Zion's report of Judas' suicide ('Die ihr Gottes Gnad' versäümet') is adapted for Deborah's plangent warning to Sisera ('In Jehovah's awful sight'), and the tempestuous 'Gift und glut' is adapted into Barak's extrovertly heroic 'All danger disdaining'.

Admittedly some other choices seem to have been made arbitrarily, and have no apparent dramatic connection with their new contexts. It is difficult to envisage a less bright and joyful choice of borrowing than 'Was Bärentatzen, Löwenklauen' for Jael's 'To joy he brightens my despair', which seems to focus predominantly on 'despair' at the expense of 'joy'. Likewise, Handel's choice of music for Jael's 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing' perhaps conveys a pious religious frenzy, but certainly not 'pleasure'; this was the product of a tenuous connection with 'Tu giurasti' from *Il Trionfo del Tempo e del*

<sup>776</sup> Two more self-borrowings from *O praise the Lord with one consent* are less effective: the mournful music chosen for 'Now sweetly smiling peace descends' is neither peaceful nor smiles, and 'Our fears are now for ever fled' conveys no impression of relief or delight.

<sup>777</sup> Dean rightly assessed that this is 'a typical piece of E flat serenity as beautiful as anything of its length (18 bars) in Handel's work, and a particularly happy re-use of old material. The father weeps for joy in the knowledge that his son's fame is assured; the new context has transfigured the music.' (Op. cit., p. 228).

<sup>778</sup> It was not the first time Handel had self-borrowed from his Naples serenata in order to furnish Montagnana with music: Polifemo's 'Fra l'ombre' was adapted for Montagnana in *Sosarme* (1732).



*Disinganno*, in which the music was sung by a character called Piacere (a personification of 'Pleasure').

Handel's policy towards self-borrowing changed by the early 1750s, when his 1751 version of *Esther* included music that his audience probably knew: 'Sacred raptures' from the recent new oratorio *Solomon* must have been fresh in the audience's memory, and music transferred from *Deborah* might have been familiar to any of Handel's audience who had attended performances between 1733 and 1744, or who collected printed editions of songs or manuscript scores. Handel's recent tragedy *Theodora*, produced in March 1750, is incontrovertible evidence that he was interested in powerful music drama in the early 1750s, but its commercial failure demonstrated that his Lenten oratorio seasons were not guaranteed success even though it seems to us that his stature as a national icon had become unassailable.<sup>779</sup> Perhaps his desire to include some popular music and entertain his audience became more important than concealing his self-borrowing.

## 10. Trying Something Different

Handel presumably liked opportunities to try new ideas, or add musical novelty, in his revised performing versions. An obvious example is his addition of extra musical features in his 1734-5 Covent Garden season, notably Italian insertions for Carestini and organ concertos in oratorios, and choruses and ballets in operas.

The addition of ballets after each act of *Arianna in Creta* (1734b) was both a visual and musical embellishment of the entertainment. It is possible that Handel envisaged his dance music sequences as *entr'actes* disassociated from the action or dramatic ideas presented in the opera, but perhaps Sallé's choreography closely related to the opera. Sarah McCleave proposes that Handel's particular dance forms were chosen to represent particular dramatic concepts: the minuet borrowed from the overture could have been intended as a reminder of the plight of the Athenian hostages when reused as the second

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<sup>779</sup> *Theodora* was 'a complete failure' and 'wretchedly attended' (Dean: Op. cit., pp. 571-2).

dance in the Act I ballet; a gigue might have depicted the troubled love relationship between Teseo and Arianna (the form had been used for similar effect in the recent *Terpsicore*); a chaconne might have portrayed Arianna's volatile temperament in the Act II ballet; the repeat of 'Bella sorge la speranza' as a dance was clearly intended to reinforce the theme of rejoicing at opera's conclusion.<sup>780</sup> Handel's primary method of involving ballets in his 1734-5 Covent Garden operas was to insert dance music sequences, but we can speculate that it also motivated him to remove material. As discussed in Chapter 3, the supernatural sinfonia in which winged cupids destroy the agreement between Crete and Athens (I.i) might have been strategically removed so that its action could be portrayed in one of the dances. Handel probably regarded the addition of dances his 1734b *Arianna in Creta* as an exciting new way to convey dramatic ideas, and as a chance to compose music in styles of which he had limited previous experience.

Handel's interest in trying new musical styles might account for some insertions in his performing versions. His last version of *Esther*, performed in 1757, features three new compositions. Two soprano airs, 'How sweet the rose' and 'This glorious deed', owe little to the musical vocabulary of the late baroque period, and both are closer to an early *galant* classical style. It is possible that the 72-year-old blind composer was trying something new, but Anthony Hicks suggested that these trite airs were both probably composed by J.C. Smith.<sup>781</sup> Each is scored for unison violins and continuo, contains uncharacteristically weak ritornellos, and features vocal writing that lacks of rhetorical power. They are inserted in ludicrously inappropriate positions where Handel had never previously inserted arias, which implies that Smith was also responsible for choosing their contexts.

However, it cannot be disputed that the septuagenarian Handel might have wanted to include some new music for its own sake. Eighteenth-century reports claim that the duet and chorus 'Sion now her head shall raise' was dictated by Handel to Smith: the Earl of

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<sup>780</sup> These ideas are comprehensively discussed in Chapter 3 of McCleave's *Dance in Opera: Handel on the London Stage* (forthcoming, publisher TBC).

<sup>781</sup> Hicks: 'The late additions to Handel's oratorios and the role of the younger Smith', p. 154.



Shaftesbury's letter to James Harris reveals that Handel's composition of new music for the first time in several years generated excitement among his supporters.<sup>782</sup> Perhaps Handel felt that his 1757 *Esther* was the last opportunity he would have to demonstrate to his public that he was still capable of composing stimulating new music of distinctive quality.<sup>783</sup> The likelihood of its at least partial authenticity is supported by it being the only 1757 addition based on a text from the Cannons *Esther*, and Handel had re-set several Cannons-period texts in 1751.<sup>784</sup> Hicks judged that only this duet is 'plainly in the main stream of Handel's mature work.'<sup>785</sup>

An interest in trying unusual musical colours might also have influenced Handel's composition of 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story', inserted in his 1732 revision of *Esther*. This duet is Handel's most expansively scored original composition for the 1732 version of the oratorio (two oboes, violin I, violin II, viola, two sopranos, and basso continuo), and he embellished its rudimentary harmonic structure by assigning different continuo support and upper accompaniment to each singer: Esther's part is supported by 'Cembalo I, con li Bassi' (without bassoons) and 2-part violins, and the Israelite Woman is accompanied by 'Cembalo II, e Bassi' and solo oboe (presumably with bassoon doubling the bass). Such precise instructions regarding the continuo instrumentation are rare in Handel's music, but it cannot be coincidental that another detailed example is the duet 'Tu caro, caro sei', which has a similar position near the end of Handel's recent new opera *Sosarme*.<sup>786</sup> It seems that during early 1732 Handel was experimenting with how instruments could be

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<sup>782</sup> Letter dated 8 February 1757 (Burrows & Dunhill: Op. cit., p. 321).

<sup>783</sup> 'Sion now' has become popular in modern performances of *Judas Maccabaeus*, but it was originally performed in, and is most relevant to, *Esther* (Dean: Op. cit., p. 213).

<sup>784</sup> The simple recitative preceding the duet ('The Lord his people shall restore, and we in Salem shall adore') was taken from the Cannons verse-anthem version of 'The Lord our enemy has slain'. Similarly, the text 'Sion now her head shall raise; tune your harps to songs of praise' was the B section of 'Praise the Lord with cheerful noise' that had been removed in 1732.

<sup>785</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>786</sup> The autograph manuscript of *Sosarme* (RM.20.c.10, f.82r) shows that the duet 'Tu caro, caro sei' has different combinations of instruments supporting each singer: Elmira is accompanied by violins and *Cembalo primo con i suoi Bassi*, and Sosarme by unison violas and *Cembalo seconda colla Teorba, e i suoi Bassi*. In both *Esther* and *Sosarme* duets, the groups combine when the voices sing together. Handel's use of theorbo in 1732 is also confirmed by his pencil marking 'Senza Cembalo, Teorba, Harpi & Basson' on Haman's 'Turn not, O Queen' in the conducting score of *Esther* (M C/261, f.107r).

used antiphonally in duets. At the very least, he was writing unusually copious instructions for his musicians.

In some performing versions we can identify Handel's desire to increase his use of orchestral resources. The addition of *The Occasional Oratorio* overture to the 1756 *Deborah* is otherwise hard to explain: he had probably not required an overture in any previous version of *Deborah*, in which the 23-bar orchestral introduction of the chorus 'Immortal Lord of Earth and Skies' (featuring three trumpets, three horns, two oboes, bassoon, and four-part strings) had served as a direct and quickly-paced springboard to the first entry of voices (an eight-part chorus). The 1756 insertion was an opportunity for the orchestra to play some richly scored and splendidly flamboyant instrumental music, and perhaps the audience had come to expect an overture.

On a smaller scale, the short sinfonia added in the 1730b *Partenope* might have been a clever trick to cover a scene change leading into the *scena ultima*; perhaps this change had caused a pregnant pause in the 1730a run of performances. Alternatively, it could have been considered a useful way to bridge the gap between the trio 'Un cor infedele' and the *scena ultima* after the intervening recitatives and arias were cut; in 1730a the scene change might have occurred during the end of Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma', but perhaps a similar change during the end of the trio was unfeasible. But it is also likely that Handel regarded the sinfonia as an opportunity to give his orchestra a moment of greater prominence, especially the solo trumpeter, who otherwise had nothing to play between the battle music in the early stages of Act II and the *scena ultima*. At bar ten of the last scene, after Partenope's line of recitative 'Qui vengano al cimento / Eurimene ed Arsace; Io mi contento', there is a stage direction: 'Suonano Trombe e Tamburri; vengono Rosmira ed Armino da una parte'.<sup>787</sup> The trumpet accompanies Arsace and 'Eurimene' stepping forward to the fight their duel, but its part is not notated. Perhaps Handel

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<sup>787</sup> The direction was taken from the source libretto, but presumably indicated stage action in Handel's performances.



considered that having the trumpeter there only to play an extemporized incidental part was a wasted opportunity.

## Part Two: The Dramatic Impact of Alterations to Libretto Texts

Revisions influence the artistic coherence of sung music dramas in two principal ways: changes to the score dictate what musical impression an audience hears, whereas changes to the libretto text affect what a character or chorus literally 'says'. The majority of Handel's revisions outlined in Chapters 2-5 concern sung texts, which most of his audience presumably read in the printed librettos. These libretto texts present literary schemes for the development of plot and dramatic characterization, even when divorced from the act of musical performance. We can observe that additions, substitutions, texts relocated to different positions, or omissions, have a literal impact upon librettos as narrative dramas.<sup>788</sup>

### Additions to librettos

In the 1730a/b versions of *Partenope*, Armindo's first attempt to declare his love to Partenope was portrayed as the fumbled failure of a painfully shy lover. Dean described that Armindo's 'exit without an aria at the end of I.vii is eloquent of his inarticulacy: an aria here would be out of place'.<sup>789</sup> I agree that Armindo's nervous clumsiness, and his retreat from the situation, is a touching representation of a lover fearing rejection, especially from such a charismatic and unpredictable woman as Partenope. However, I disagree that an exit aria for Armindo would be dramatically inappropriate. In 1737 Handel inserted 'Bramo restar', in which Armindo's indecisive lack of confidence is reinforced:

I would stay, but no –  
How could I leave?  
Oh! cruel torment  
I will leave, though: Farewell!  
Farewell, but what then?

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<sup>788</sup> Alternative readings of librettos, such as political, cultural or moral allegory, are no less important, but are beyond the scope of the dissertation.

<sup>789</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 160.



My feet return to where they started

Oh! I do not know how to part

from my sorrow.

Although 'Bramo restar' prolongs Armindo's 'addio' to Partenope, previously confined to his recitative, it reinforces the impression of him being caught between embarrassment (his resolve to leave) and a compelling desire to look fondly upon Partenope for as long as possible (she is clearly the source of his sorrow, yet he does not know how to part from her without expressing some tenderness). The text is a highly effective and telling addition to the 1737 version of this scene: it deepens our perception of Armindo's loyalty and passion for Partenope, whilst its presentation of a character caught in a paradox - wanting to stay whilst also desperate to leave - remains evocative of his anxiety. In this 1737 text, Armindo is not inept or inarticulate: he is simply lacking in confidence, and is obviously more sincere than any of his other rivals for Partenope's love.

Handel also used an additional aria text to emphasize the sincerity of an unfortunate lover in his 1734a *Arianna in Creta*. Teseo's 'Sdegnata sei con me' was inserted in I.xi, probably after Handel considered that the duet 'Bell' idolo amato' better served as a portrait of the uneasy relationship between Teseo and Arianna, repositioned to II.xiv. The duet portrays Arianna's distrust of Teseo's fidelity, which is not resolved by the end of the duet. In its 1733 location it precedes her long brilliant aria 'Sdegno, amore', an observation on the fickle nature of love (a recurring theme in the original legend of Theseus and Ariadne's ill-fated relationship), but in 1734a Handel instead placed it before Arianna's lament 'Se nel bosco', a tenser context by which her insecurities have increased along with intensification of the plot.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>790</sup> Handel planned sentimental duets for unfortunate lovers or family members at the end of middle Acts in several operas: 'Io t'abbraccio' (*Rodelinda*) and 'Se il cor ti perde' (*Tolomeo*) both conform exactly to this pattern. Such duets indicate adverse circumstances that mark the emotional climax of their respective operas, and are usually resolved during Act III. The duet 'Son nata a lagrima' (for Sesto and Cornelia in *Giulio Cesare*) is similar to some extent, but is located at the end of Act I. Conversely, a happy duet for lovers

The duet works infinitely better in its revised 1734a position, but Handel needed to fill the gap its removal had left in I.xi, ideally with a text in which Teseo responded to Arianna's unrightfully jealous accusations. 'Sdegnata sei con me' is a fitting text for Tesco to use in placation of Arianna:

Suspect not, Fair, my constant Love,  
Nor think I cou'd deceitful prove;  
My Heart alone belongs to you  
My Faith I keep most firm and true.  
Heav'n only knows my secret Breast,  
If with a faithless Love possess'd:  
I cruel seem to you, my Fair,  
Yet you my dearest object are.

This added text shows Teseo eloquently protesting his innocence and simultaneously declaring his love for Arianna. His response to Arianna's accusations are more patient and wooing than they appear in the more frustrated text of 'Bell' idolo amato' (in which he requests that she stop complaining). It may be that the enhanced dramatic portrayal of a softer aspect of Teseo's character was designed to exploit a quality in Carestini's acting that was underemployed in the first draft of the opera, but Handel saw the opportunity when the castrato arrived in London.

Handel's 1732 revision of *Esther* was expanded with a large number of new texts provided by Samuel Humphreys. Some of the most intriguing additions to the text were made to the role of the Persian king Assuerus and his villainous manipulative counsellor Haman. Humphreys added Assuerus' impetuous order that Haman pursue the Jews 'with a relentless hand' (I.ii) without first having pondered whether Haman's claims are supported

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during the first part of a Handel theatre work is virtually an invitation for something to go horribly wrong (see *Acis & Galatea*, *Ariodante*, and *Jephtha* for three diverse examples). None of these scenarios were Handel's intention with the conflicting 'Bell' idolo amato' in *Arianna in Creta*, which acts as a stimulus for Arianna to conclude the Act with an impressive soliloquy aria.



by any evidence. Whether it was Humphreys' intention or not, this added scene portrays a monarch who is unpredictable and impetuous enough to be capable of getting rid of another Queen if she displeases him,<sup>791</sup> and Assuerus' arbitrary instruction for Haman to 'purge Rebellion from the tainted Land' establishes credibility for Esther's fear in Act II.

Assuerus' comment to Haman that 'Thy Virtues merit all I can bestow' indicates that either the King is not a reliable judge of character, or that there is some reason for him to assume that Haman possesses notable virtues. The latter scenario makes Haman's fate increasingly tragic: he has not betrayed his King, and Assuerus is as fully responsible as Haman for the persecution of the Jews. The added text 'Endless fame' establishes the King's loyalty and affection for Haman.<sup>792</sup> It is probable that this air was principally designed as an opportunity for Senesino to perform coloratura during Act I, but Humphreys' new text is a clear indication of the King's trust in his counsellor, which increases the seriousness of Haman's manipulation of the King for his own selfish ends.

However, the suggestion of friendship between Assuerus and Haman is not counterbalanced with a more personal response from the king to Haman's treachery (III.ii). Instead of responding directly to his traitorous friend, perhaps showing some remorse, grief, or regret over the loss of his counsellor, or having the King angrily leave the banquet to ponder his difficult decision in the garden (as in the Bible), Humphreys instead retained Assuerus' perfunctory and concise reaction from the Cannons libretto, and after it inserted 'Thro' the nation', which is a spontaneous bestowal of worldly honour upon his new trusted counsellor Mordecai. According to both of Humphreys' inserted aria texts for Assuerus, the king has a tendency to promise endless fame and glory to anybody who shows loyalty, and the nature of this apparent lack of discernment reveals little variation in sentiment or in promises between an unwise example (Haman in Act I) and a more judicious choice (Mordecai in Act III). Assuerus' instant transferral of loyalty to Mordecai and condemnation of Haman at the end of the oratorio is evidence of an unsteady and

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<sup>791</sup> His previous wife, Vashti, was banished from his presence and divorced after displeasing him.

<sup>792</sup> See Appendix 4b for all English texts in *Esther*.

fickle monarch, who rules by whimsical impulse rather than on ideal forms of sensible government. Humphreys' biblical commentary, published three years after his *Esther* texts were written, confirms that he perceived Assuerus as an inferior model of kingship:

It is evident from this history, that the heart of kings is on the hand of God, who by this book teaches them, that they must bear the burden of the crown themselves, and see with their own eyes; lest leaving their authority to others, they should meet with those who abuse it, like Haman, in gratification of their own passions and corrupt interests.<sup>793</sup>

Another new 1732 text hints towards a new aspect of characterization for Haman, whose added recitative in I.ii explains that his dislike of the Jews stems from his perception of their pride. This conversation between Haman and Assuerus creates a stronger impression of his bloodlust, but Humphreys did not capitalise upon the opportunity to expand Haman elsewhere. The librettist might have assumed that the audience's biblical knowledge would have been sufficient that he did not need to explain that Haman's attempted genocide against the Jews was motivated by his personal hatred for Mordecai,<sup>794</sup> but it is disappointing that he did not invent some kind of confrontation between the Persian and Jewish catalysts.<sup>795</sup> At least one encounter would have intensified the conflict between Haman and Mordecai, and would have remedied a fundamental weakness in the plot's coherence. Haman's hatred of Mordecai instigates the dramatic conflict of the oratorio, yet without evidence of that relationship Esther's brave approach to the King has obscure motivation, and Haman's prejudice is generalised where it could have been specifically focused upon another central character.<sup>796</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> *The Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament, Recited at Large*, London, 1735, commentary on the *Book of Esther*, Ch. 7. Discussed in Smith: Op. cit., p. 285.

<sup>794</sup> According to the Bible, Haman is repeatedly angered by Mordecai's refusal to bow to him at the King's gate (Esther 3. 1-6; 5. 9).

<sup>795</sup> The scene between Harapha and the title-hero in Newburgh Hamilton's libretto for *Samson* proves that Handel could have presented such a scene with excellent results.

<sup>796</sup> Smith commented that Haman's 'motivation is almost totally absent from the libretto, so Haman appears more simply as a prototype paranoid dictator.' (Op. cit., p. 280).



Likewise, it can be argued that Humphreys should have added more libretto text, perhaps the biblical account of Haman gloating to his wife about his invitation to the King's banquet, her suggestion that he build tall gallows to hang Mordecai upon, and his pleasure at an apparently imminent triumph over his enemy.<sup>797</sup> This ironic element of the story possesses obvious potential for an engaging dramatic representation, and would have made Haman's fall from grace even more deserved. Similarly, the characters of Haman and Assuerus would have both benefited from Humphreys setting the biblical incident in which the sleepless king orders the chronicles of his kingdom to be read to him, and is reminded that Mordecai once saved his life. Haman arrives at the court to petition for Mordecai's execution, and is about to do so when the King asks him 'What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?' Haman, assuming Assuerus refers to him, gleefully suggests 'Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head'.<sup>798</sup> Assuerus orders Haman to 'do even so to Mordecai [...] let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.' Haman carries out the King's instructions, and returns home in despair until he is fetched for the banquet.

One imagines that Handel would have relished the chance to represent such theatrical irony in these biblical scenes, any of which would have developed the oratorio into a fuller and more vivid music drama. However, the opportunity to insert such scenes was neglected, perhaps because they would have demanded more extensive restructuring of the Cannons score, and Handel needed to prepare his 1732 version of *Esther* in a hurry. Unfortunately, Haman's desire for revenge at Mordecai's political slight of him is not explicitly stated in the oratorio. Perhaps the composer or the librettist was less concerned with the interaction of personalities than in exploring Haman as a representative of indiscriminate genocide. Without the depiction of personal hatred for Mordecai, we can

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<sup>797</sup> Esther 5. 9-14.

<sup>798</sup> Esther 6. 8-9.

interpret Haman as a tragic figure led astray by misconceived duty, rather than as the simple pantomime villain that he appears in the Cannons version.<sup>799</sup>

Neither is Mordecai’s characterization expanded in his 1732 libretto insertions. ‘So much beauty’ (I.i) is a tepid text that serves only to tell the audience that Esther’s beauty will have power over the King. This might be interpreted as a prophetic statement, although the preceding recitative ‘The lord of Asia, on his throne, now languishes for thee alone, and by the empire in his breast, Judea may again be blest’ implies a desire that Esther manipulate the King for political purposes, which a modern reader may speculate is comparable with Haman’s actions.<sup>800</sup> However, Handel’s audience might have found ample justification for Mordecai’s manipulation of the monarch by claiming that the God of Israel was not on Haman’s side.

Two duet texts added to *Esther* in 1732 are successfully integrated into the oratorio. The duet ‘Blessings descend on downy wings’ (II.iii), for Mordecai and the Israelite Woman, was adapted from Handel’s ode *Eternal source of light divine* with barely any changes except in the B section:

Ode (Ambrose Philips, 1713)	<i>Esther</i> (Samuel Humphreys, 1732)
Kind health descends on downy Wings, Angels conduct her on the way: T’ our glorious Queen new life she brings, and swells our joys upon this Day.	Blessings descend on downy Wings, Angels guard her on her way: New Life our Royal Esther brings, Since our Cause she pleads today.

‘New life’ is swapped to a modified position in the third line, and the last line demonstrates a more substantial departure from the 1713 text. The ode’s text is successfully transformed

<sup>799</sup> Ruth Smith suggested to me that Humphreys might have preferred Haman’s desire to commit genocide to his having a personal agenda against Mordecai (personal communication). Several of Handel’s 1732 theatre works explore the concept of majesty misled by an evil minister (*Sosarme*, *Ezio*, and *Esther*), although it is not certain that this trend was consciously intended to have contemporary allegorical significance to the Hanoverian monarchy and its prime minister Walpole.

<sup>800</sup> Mordecai does not suggest taking this manipulation as far as genocide within the oratorio. However, in the Bible the oratorio’s events are followed by a bloody slaughter of Haman’s family and 75,000 Persians.



into the Israelites' sentimental expression of concern for Esther, and is a prayer that she will be guarded by Angels.

The duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' (III.ii) is one of Humphreys' few entirely original texts, and allows Esther to make her final contribution to the oratorio with an expression of gratitude, faith, and humility. In the Cannons score, Esther's last contribution was 'Flatt'ring tongue', which is spiteful, vindictive, and scornful of Haman's begging for mercy. This would not have been a satisfying last impression of a virtuous heroine, but the added text shows her singing praise to God rather than (understandable) cruelty to mankind. It is also notable that Esther modestly attributes the victory to God's mercy rather than her own beauty or cunning, which might otherwise be inferred from the numerous references to Assuerus' susceptibility to her feminine charms.

Added libretto texts can also enhance dramatic characterization in some of Handel's performing versions of *Deborah*. In all versions during the 1730s it had been peculiar that Sisera, one of the most important characters in the drama, at least from a functional point of view as the token villain, did not perform an energetically charged exit aria in II.ii. In 1744 Handel remedied this by inserting Sisera's extra air 'Hence I hasten'.<sup>801</sup> The text was taken from the revision of *Athalia* made in 1743 for an aborted revival, and was printed in the *Deborah* libretto without change. However, it is clear that only the A section was ever performed, and its B section omitted. One reason for the text's abridgement was that Sisera is not 'a Sov'reign in Anger', but the captain of King Jabin's army. A parody B section text was not invented, perhaps because the A section of 'Hence I hasten' is extensively developed musically and unusually long, so a full da capo would stretch the notion of 'hastening hence' too thinly even for baroque music theatre. Handel retained the movement in all his subsequent revivals of *Deborah*.

The 1756 *Deborah* has only one new additional text. Barak's 'Hateful man' (I.iv) is a long-overdue improvement to his dismissal of the Herald's smug invitation to parley,

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<sup>801</sup> See Appendix 5b for all English texts in *Deborah*.

which had hitherto always been followed directly with an anti-climactic recitative for Deborah expressing exactly the same overall meaning. The forceful tone of Barak's recitative text scorning the Herald implies a strong personality, and demands a more forceful theatrical impact than another simple recitative. Handel had already attempted to enhance this scene in 1744 with the insertion of the air 'My vengeance awakes me', which failed to work either owing to dramatic incoherence (if it was supposed to be sung by Beard whilst in character as Sisera),<sup>802</sup> or to the excessive inflation of the Herald's role. In 1756 Handel at last granted Barak a text that lives up to his role as Israelite hero, and more potently indicates his personal antipathy towards the conceited Herald.

Such examples demonstrate that new added texts could be beneficial to Handel's music theatre works, but other examples illustrate that they could be unproductive from a dramatic perspective. Texts from *Esther* were added to Jael's part the opening scene of *Deborah* in 1744a. The accompanied recitative 'Methinks I hear the mother's groans' presents Jael as a more dominant and authoritative figure than hitherto portrayed, and the general mood of lamentation evident in the *Esther* music is a successful transfer to *Deborah* in some respects. It intensifies the sense of trepidation, the text is relevant to the persecution expressed by the Israelites in the preceding chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer', and it has a relevant topical connection to Deborah's subsequent recitative 'Ye sons of Israel'. But whilst the overall impression of 'Methinks I hear' is adequate for Jael, there is a significant discrepancy in the libretto's new context: Mordecai's anguished expression that his Persian overlords are about to commit genocide against the Jews has limited relevance to Jael's circumstances; although the Israelites are in customary peril in *Deborah*, their Canaanite enemies wish them to abandon Jehovah, but otherwise express no desire to destroy them. It is especially problematic that Mordecai's air 'O Jordan, Jordan, sacred tide, shall we no more behold thee glide the fertile vales

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<sup>802</sup> It must be noted that it was not unknown for an individual singer to perform several different characters in Handel's English music theatre works. The soprano Frasi managed the dramatically incredible achievement of acting the part of three utterly incongruous women in *Solomon: Pharaoh's Daughter* (Part 1), the First Harlot (Part 2), and the Queen of Sheba (Part 3).



along' is an irrelevant and nonsensical text in *Deborah*: the Israelites are in captivity under the Canaanites, but they are not in held captive in exile. They have no need to lament their homeland, nor do they miss the river Jordan.

In the 1751 *Esther* Handel added texts for the 'Priest Israelite' in I.iv, including an accompanied recitative text 'Methinks I see each stately tow'r rise', linking into the air 'Sacred raptures' (taken from *Solomon*). The first text is a prophetic statement that Esther will save her people, based on music that fulfilled a similar function prior to 'Sacred raptures' in its original context. In both cases, Handel used a prominent harmonic progression in the upper strings to emphasize crucial words, but it is notable that the Priest Israelite's contribution to *Esther* is generally less declamatory than Zadok's harmonically detailed and more complex original in *Solomon*. The recitative's text is approximately pertinent to *Esther*, but the insertion of 'Sacred raptures' is incongruously optimistic and premature. The ebullient joy communicated in both text and music of 'Sacred raptures' was entirely appropriate for Zadok's pride in Solomon's achievements, but its extrovert rejoicing seems bizarrely gleeful and contrary to the subsequent texts expressing the Israelites' mourning in *Esther*. While no doubt its insertion was a convenient way to create an extra role for Thomas Lowe, the text is grossly over-ecstatic and misplaced.

Two notably weak and artistically redundant texts were added to *Esther* in 1757. After the chorus 'He comes!' (III.i), the Israelite Woman primly speaks to Esther: 'Permit me, Queen, with duteous address, thus to congratulate your due Success.' Such a congratulatory comment in this position is a tedious digression and ridiculously premature. There is no doubt that Handel's audience expected Esther to be triumphant by the end, but the Israelite Woman's gushing intrusion is made at a point in the plot when Esther has not yet achieved anything apart from surviving an unbidden approach to Assuerus, and her attempt to reveal Haman's treachery to the king is interrupted by this interfering well-wisher. The intrusive Israelite's air 'How Sweet the Rose' continues in the same vein. It mentions Esther's beauty - a well-worn fact established several times by this point in the

oratorio - and compares her to a rose blooming in spring in some tawdry poetry. This text has nothing whatsoever to do with the oratorio; it hinders the narrative and makes no pertinent comments.

Esther later emulates this pointless interruption herself, with a comparably atrocious new text inserted immediately following Assuerus' 'Thro' the Nation' (III.iii). Esther delays Haman's philosophical comment on his doom ('How art thou fallen') with a verbose recitative expressing gratitude to the king that utterly lacks any convincing trace of their marital affection, and then utters the air 'This glorious deed', which is anti-dramatic dross and hinders the theatrical impact of Haman's last words. It also preempts an identical sentiment more successfully expressed in the duet 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story', which also wisely attributes the credit for Esther's victory to God rather than to the whim of a mortal monarch.

### Substitutions and Parody Texts

On some occasions Handel would replace an aria with a different one, which also had a different text. Sometimes this method created incongruous dramatic problems that can seem risible to modern observers,<sup>803</sup> but some changed texts are effective alternatives that fit the dramatic situation and character. In the 1734b *Arianna in Creta*, Tauride's 'Mirami, altero in volto' (I.ii) was replaced by 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti'. In the original 1733/1734a aria, Tauride arrogantly scoffs at Teseo's bravery, and challenges the Athenian prince to prove his courage during his visit to Crete:

Behold my haughty Brow, and see,

My Heart's collected Force appear.

Who over me wou'd Conqueror be,

Like me must have no Fear.

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<sup>803</sup> Dean rightly observed that the insertion of 'Agitato da fiero tempeste' (from *Riccardo Primo*) for Carestini in his 1734 revival of *Sosarme* was 'peculiarly inapt as the first utterance of a would-be peacemaker' (Op. cit., p. 226).



This is the first aria of the opera, and instantly establishes Tauride as an arrogant and antagonistic opponent to Teseo. The 1734b replacement aria removes Tauride's desire for others to admire him, and is less obviously conceited. However, 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' is contemptuous of Teseo due to its insinuation that the Athenian's valorous words are worthless:

The accents of your lips are scattered in the air by the winds;

A generous heart boasts only of its deeds.

In warlike contest alone

does a noble valour find its satisfaction.

The 1734b text also has more irony because Tauride's claim that 'a generous heart boasts only of its deeds' is hypocritical: during the opera he demonstrates no generosity towards anybody (he is actively unkind to Carilda, whom he professes to love), and does nothing that can qualify as a worthy deed. Handel's 1734b revision therefore has positive attributes in its libretto text that are not evident in the different rhetorical tone of the prouder 'Mirami altero in volto'. From a textual point of view, the alternative aria text is entirely successful.

Handel's creation of alternative arias for scenes could have a considerable impact upon the moral allegory of an entire opera. The concluding aria in his first version of *Partenope* was 'Sì scherza sì' (III.x), in which the beleaguered Partenope is restored to her former playful and light-hearted self. This a judicious addition to the opera made during the composition process.<sup>804</sup> Perhaps the composer was dissatisfied with the source libretto's lack of musical opportunities, and inserted an aria with an aptly bittersweet text in which Partenope shares her newfound wisdom about the cruel lessons of love. Partenope's text concludes 'Content in love did never reign without an intermingled pain'.

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<sup>804</sup> See Chapter 2 Part 1.

This serves as a poignant moral allegory relevant to the painful emotions about love experienced collectively by all five leading players.

This thoughtful scheme and dramaturgical 'punch-line' was changed in the 1730b revival. Handel cut 'Sì scherza sì' in order to accommodate the insertion of 'Seguaci di Cupido' five lines later:

Cupid's Followers,

you that are ever a-changing;

You will never find a more faithful

love than the very first.

It seems to you that the first object of your love

no longer melts your heart;

But, unfaithful lovers, admit

you still feel it!

Handel undoubtedly inserted this movement to increase the dominance of Senesino at the end of the opera. The text, taken from the source libretto, is pertinent to Arsace's relationship with Rosmira, whose reconciliation is communicated only through recitative in 1730a. This adds a neat conclusion to the central romantic relationship in the opera, and shows Arsace as a matured and penitent exponent of fidelity, but 'Seguaci di Cupido' dilutes the opera's closing moments because it excludes Partenope, Armindo and Emilio from its sentiments, and diminishes their equally important sentimental journeys. Furthermore, Senesino's heroic aria, a compound-time allegro in C minor music, is much less charming musically than the gently quizzical tone of Partenope's lighter triple-time G major aria that it replaced. Handel's alternative aria text in 1730b fulfills its role adequately, but is not as satisfying as the inspired solution that he designed in 1730a.

Parody texts can be reasonably successful in Handel's operas owing to the generic conventions of simile texts. A helmsman struggling to find his way safely to harbour whilst



navigating a tempestuous ocean tends to fit any number of situations involving emotional confusion and turmoil. Likewise, Alceste's 'D'instabile Cupido' (1734b *Arianna in Creta*) is a musico-dramatically sensible parody, in which the unstable wheel of fortune described by Berengario in *Lotario* is transformed into Alceste's complaint about the instability of love without any incongruity: Handel's musical setting illustrates the rocky motion of instability, not the precise characteristics of either political fortune or unrequited love. With minimal alteration, an Italian opera simile aria text can be interpolated into a suitable situation in another opera with a reasonable chance of success.

More extensive parody texts were necessary in the 1732 *Esther*. The expansion of the six scenes in the original Cannons version into a longer three-act theatre entertainment for London required Handel and Humphreys to end Act I with the chorus 'Ye sons of Israel mourn', and to invent the new chorus for the opening of Act II. For the chorus, Handel chose to use the music for 'Virtue, truth and innocence' (Cannons, scene v), but its text observing that these three characteristics were Esther's 'sure defence', and that 'propitious heav'n will hear her pray'r', would have been dramatically nonsensical if moved to the beginning of Act II.<sup>805</sup> Humphreys provided the chorus with a new parody text 'Tyrants may a while presume':

Cannons, scene V	1732, II.i
Virtue, Truth, and Innocence, Shall ever be her sure Defence: She is Heavn's peculiar Care, Propitious Heav'n will hear her Pray'r.	Tyrants may a while presume They never shall, receive their Doom; But they soon shall, trembling, know. Stern Justice Strikes the surest Blow.

Humphreys' poetry is entirely different from the original, except for his use of 'never shall' in the second line to resonate with the original text's 'ever be'; the retained vowel

<sup>805</sup> The abandoned text of 'Virtue, truth and innocence' was resuscitated for the Israelite soprano's air inserted in 1751. Although a Cannons text, Handel chose to use it as a parody text which he superimposed on to 'When the sun o'er yonder hill' from *Solomon*. The graceful dance-like music suits the descriptive context in *Solomon* much better than the concept of God protecting the virtuous. By a curious quirk of fate, the omission of Esther's air 'Heaven! O lend my every charm' put the text of 'Virtue, truth, and innocence' in the identical position in both Cannons and 1751 versions. This exact correspondence between a revision and a text last used about thirty-three years before is another clue that Handel might have selected the insertion texts without assistance.

sounds have an effect that is fundamental to the success of Handel's word-painting, which in the Cannons *Esther* had already been taken from an older work almost without change. The original text for which Handel had created his music was 'Mich vom Stricke', which begins the *Brockes Passion*. Perhaps this influenced him to consider using the same music in an introductory function for Act II of *Esther* in 1732. In the event, Humphreys' concept that 'Stern justice strikes the surest blow' efficiently signifies Haman's impending fall, is far better suited to the angular counterpoint and jerking rhythms of Handel's sober G minor music than the flowery Cannons prose describing propitious heaven hearing a virtuous maid's prayer. 'Tyrants may a while presume' is a rare example of a parody that is an improvement on the text it replaced.

The insertion of *Zadok the Priest* might have caused Humphreys a little more difficulty. The middle section of the coronation anthem, 'and all the people rejoiced and said', had to be removed because its use of the past tense to describe the Israelites rejoicing would have been nonsensical while they remain under threat from Haman's persecution in *Esther*. The omission of Handel's music for this section, with its lively dotted rhythms and splendid trumpets, was regrettable. Perhaps Humphreys could not design an adequate parody for the bridging sentence prior to the declamations of 'God save the king!'. Humphreys provided new text for the opening bars, portraying the Israelites' increased optimism after Esther has survived her unbidden approach to Assuerus, and is effective as a literal supplication to Divine power. Handel presumably had to reset the rhythm of the choral chords: 'God is our hope and he shall cause the king to shew mercy to Jacobs's race' requires eighteen syllables, two more than 'Zadok the Priest, and Nathan the Prophet, anointed Solomon king', and the word-stresses in the middle part of Humphreys' parody are dissimilar. Handel probably reworked the choral parts to accommodate Humphreys' parody solution, but no musical source has survived.<sup>806</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> My editorial suggestion for fitting 'God is our hope' to *Zadok the Priest* is in Appendix 4e.



### Italian texts in English oratorio librettos

It is open to debate whether or not music drama that is communicated to an audience in two different languages is aesthetically plausible. At the present time many opera houses worldwide use surtitles, and commercial recordings are usually accompanied with booklets featuring translations of the sung texts in parallel. It may be that a mixture of languages is not an insurmountable hurdle to a modern audience's enjoyment of a music theatre work, and printed librettos in Handel's own bilingual oratorio performances might have assisted his audience in a similar way.

However, there can be no doubt that the dramatic coherence of *Deborah* was compromised by his endeavour to incorporate Italian sung texts in 1734. To spare Carestini from the discomfort of singing recitative in English, Barak's text explaining that Jael has assassinated Sisera was cut. Jael's first-hand report of her deed (III.iii), cut for Oxford in 1733b, was not performed either. Therefore there is no mention of the actual method of the Israelites' victory over the Canaanite captain in the 1734 sung text. The catalytic aspect of the plot's conclusion is entirely obscured to listeners, although attentive readers could read the full text in the wordbook. It was equally damaging that the reduction of Barak's contribution also led Handel to omit most of Abinoam's part. 'Awake the ardour of thy breast' was omitted, and a slender amount of Abinoam's recitative was retained solely to place Carestini's subsequent recitative and aria into context. Abinoam's 'Swift Inundation' (and its preceding recitative) was cut, and the touching dialogue between Barak and his father prior to 'Tears, such as tender fathers shed' was removed.

It is possible Handel wished to avoid spending rehearsal time with Reinhold on Abinoam's music, when he was more concerned about Carestini, Scalzi and Maria Negri. However, the removal of almost all traces of the relationship between Barak and his father Abinoam illustrates that Handel was conscious that mingling Italian and English texts together was dramatically nonsensical. By avoiding bilingual conversation between characters – especially those passages exploring a relationship between a father and son –

the composer was taking care to avoid presenting a dramatic situation in an unconvincing manner that would be open to ridicule from the public. The filial relationship between Barak and Abinoam is stripped of its core in 1734, and the loss of two bass arias with striking and animated accompaniment deprives the oratorio of some of its best extrovert music. Abinoam's tattered role in 1734 was no doubt expedient, but it damaged the musical diversity of *Deborah*, and diminished the already scant elements of psychologically penetrating characterization.

The avoidance of recitative for the Italians was damaging to the dramatic integrity of the oratorio, but texts given Italian parodies were equally problematic.<sup>807</sup> The character of the Israelite Woman was replaced by the castrato Scalzi's Italian 'Israelite', who sang two arias with new parody Italian texts. Jael's 'To joy he brightens my despair', altered to 'Chi spera in Dio', is an illogical text that describes Jael but using masculine terms, and the anonymous observation that God can 'remove all deceit' is a particularly ludicrous inconsistency: it is purely through deceit that Jael will later slaughter Sisera. Scalzi also performed the Israelite Woman's 'Now sweetly smiling peace', with its text adjusted to 'Più bello ancor risplende'; the literal meaning of the Italian parody text is closer to the original English words, but those responsible for the inserted leaf of Italian texts forgot to change the heading 'Israelite Woman' to fit Scalzi, unless they were enjoying a private joke at the castrato's expense.

The Italian parody text for Barak's 'How lovely is the blooming Fair' ('Più bella spoglia') is successfully integrated, and expresses a unique idea distinct from the English words. Its four lines flow through a sensible rhetorical discussion in praise of virtue, as in the original English verse, but the author has added an extra thought that virtue is immortal whilst worldly beauty perishes. In this instance, the Italian text expresses a subtler, more complex, idea about virtue, although it is not obviously relevant to the virtue of Deborah,

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<sup>807</sup> For the 1734 parody Italian texts (and English translations) see Appendix 5d.



Jael, or the fairer sex. Instead, it appears that the Italian Barak is making a moral observation equally applicable to any *opera seria* hero.

‘Disprezzo il periglio’ (Barak’s ‘All dangers disdaining’) illustrates that aria texts were apparently more difficult to make convincing than simple recitatives. Whilst the ‘English’ Barak has no doubt that he will survive the battle with the Lord’s protection, the Italian Barak is hedonistic and reckless: ‘If death thinks it can frighten me / I will die as a brave man’ expresses a callous defiance of death, but the English original shows Barak is not seeking a glorious death in battle. Handel’s omission of the chorus ‘Let thy deeds be glorious’ appears to be a strategy to get from ‘Disprezzo il periglio’ to the arrival of the herald as soon as possible. Perhaps Handel wanted to return to the development of the plot as quickly as possible after such a clumsy aria text.

Barak’s ‘Le campagne qui d’intorno’ (the 1734 Italian parody version of ‘In the battle fame pursuing’) faithfully preserves the literal meaning of the original text, although the Italian text seems colloquial and lacks the lofty poetic style one expects to find from oratorio heroes. The meaning of the texts is the same, but the personality conveyed by them is not. Indeed, the comparatively bloodthirsty and assertive tone of the Italian text is yet more incongruous with the character of Handel’s music. Barak’s last aria ‘Mai quel altier’ (‘Low at her feet’) is worst of all: it refers to the dying Sisera having to kiss the foot of ‘the man whose valour beat him down’, but even opera singers accustomed to extended death scenes would have recognized that a man murdered in his sleep by having a nail driven through his head would not be likely to kiss anything or anyone. Again, the Italian texts in both recitative and aria absurdly describe Jael in masculine terms. This text is arguably the direst of the generally woeful 1734 Italian parody texts.

Barak seems more like a typically forthright *opera seria* hero in his recitative ‘Se a tanto onore mi destina il cielo’, which condenses the original English recitative into half the number of lines, and results in Barak uttering less tiresome verbiage than in the original English libretto: ‘If heaven destines me for such honour I will uphold the cause with

unshakeable zeal.' However, the integrity of the Italian text rapidly deteriorates in the subsequent duet 'Dove m'innalza il core' ('Where would thy ardours raise me'). Instead of four lines of flowing verse, the parody Italian text is a jerky collection of four sentences that are almost totally independent of one another. Deborah's response concludes 'L'Empio cadrà al tuo piè' ('The evil man will fall at your feet'). Had this been plural (i.e. 'The evil men'), it might have made sense, but the singular form implies that Barak will personally defeat Sisera. This is a considerable dramatic error: Sisera has not even been mentioned yet, and this carelessly-worded text presents a revisionist attitude to the biblical story that is most unlikely. Barak could not have plausibly become the actual slayer of the villain in the eyes of Handel's biblically-literate audience, but the notable omission of giving Jael any credit for killing Sisera in the 1734 sung text suggests that perhaps Carestini was a vain enough *primo uomo* to persuade Handel to rewrite the story presenting Barak in as heroic a light as possible. If so, Handel's audience would surely have found this conceited rewriting of the Old Testament utterly ridiculous. Alternatively, the Italian parody texts might have been prepared by somebody who failed to understand the plot.

The duet 'Cor in calma' better retains the approximate meaning of 'Smiling freedom, lovely guest', although Deborah's verse is notably less coherent and sensible than Barak's response. We can speculate whether Carestini and Strada found it difficult to take these poorly constructed texts seriously. However, it is significant that Handel consistently allocated Strada Italian parody texts in duets with Carestini, although she apparently did not find it difficult to sing in English. Handel's wish to avoid mixing English and Italian texts together within single numbers was probably the principal reason why the confrontational chorus 'All your boasts will end in woe', in which each principal character contributes a solo line, was cut in 1734. Dean considered 'All your boasts' to be one of most convincing moments in *Deborah*,<sup>808</sup> but its omission improves the pace of the plot:

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<sup>808</sup> 'Here there is conflict [...] the head-on clash of two temperaments, two bodies of opinion. The ... piece is entirely dramatic, and a portent of things to come' (*Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 230). It is possible that Dean, possibly eager to identify this ensemble as an embryonic form of the trios, quartets and



Sisera does not needlessly prolong his exit by bickering with his foes, and there is instead a sense of ill-tempered urgency in his departure.

Handel's revisions to the 1734 *Deborah* suggest that the composer was unconvinced that the cutting and parody methods formed a successful way to prepare a bilingual oratorio performance. He was evidently unable to remedy all of the miscalculated 1734 alterations for his next revival in April 1735, but it is notable that he evolved a more varied approach for the contemporary revival of *Esther*.

In *Esther*, only one of Assuerus' English airs was given an Italian parody: 'Endless fame' (I.ii) became 'Quella fama', in which the Italian-speaking King of Persia repeats the English equivalent's promise to Haman that fame 'promises you great glory'. However, the Italian text moralistically counsels that Haman 'may fight and triumph, but glory is still uncertain, while compassion makes glory certain.'<sup>809</sup> Therefore 'Quella fama' portrays Assuerus sharing enlightened advice that only compassion can make glory certain. I doubt this was a consequence of deliberate artistic planning because this kind of text is the type of conventional moral found in *opera seria*, presenting a similar ideology to Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma' in *Partenope*. Nevertheless, 'Quella fama' creates an unprecedented impression that Assuerus is better able to criticise his minister and govern his empire, and depicts a different and wiser King who advocates compassion, unlike the shortsighted and impulsive monarch illustrated in 'Endless fame'.

Carestini was the only singer who needed to sing Italian in the 1735 *Esther*, and his other known contributions were all newly-composed additions. The literary quality of these is an advance on the poor parody texts in *Deborah*; perhaps a different and superior author was responsible, and maybe it was easier to prepare Italian parody texts to the music of the Latin motet *Silete venti* or existing Italian arias than it had been for English airs and duets in *Deborah*. The examples of inserted pages containing Italian additions discovered in

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finales found in operas by respected established dramatic composers such as Mozart and Verdi, over-rated a chorus that Handel was not particularly pleased with.

<sup>809</sup> For the Italian texts used in the 1735 *Esther* (and English translations) see Appendix 4d.

wordbooks of *Deborah* and *Athalia* indicate that the *Esther* texts were probably not translated for the audience, so it is doubtful whether all of Handel's audience would have accurately or fully appreciated the meaning of Italian interludes. But Appendix 4d demonstrates that the Italian additions to *Esther* are coherent texts, suitable to their probable contexts, and would have been understood at least by Handel, his singers, and those of his audience who had mastered Italian during the 'Grand Tour'.

Some of Carestini's additions do not have obvious connections with Assuerus, and might not have been sung 'in character'. It is impossible to establish the exact position of 'Angelico splendor', in which Carestini implored 'angelic splendour' to 'illuminate the noble heart and let torment flee'. This could have been addressed to Esther, perhaps after her fainting in the throne-room scene; it seems that a long coloratura aria would seem disproportionate for Assuerus in that scene, its musical rhetoric does not seem suited to that context, and it is unlikely that Carestini would have sung both this and 'Tua bellezza' in the same scene. Alternatively, the B section text inviting a 'choir of angels' to 'breathe into [Esther] a holy ardour' suggests that 'Angelico splendor' may have been inserted prior to a chorus. 'Shall we of servitude complain', in which the Israelites optimistically make light of their burden,<sup>810</sup> but the text of 'Angelico splendor' fulfills a similar function to 'Watchful angels' in the oratorio's opening scene, and the reference to a choir of angels might relate to *My heart is inditing*. In either position, it is dramatically nonsensical that Assuerus would appear to offer premature encouragement to Esther and the Israelites. I assume that Carestini's 'Angelico splendor' was not intended to be associated with the character Assuerus, and that it functioned as an impersonal 'moralistic' aria. It seems that singers stepping in and out of character was an accepted practice in bilingual oratorio performances during the mid-1730s.

'Bianco giglio' also has an ambiguous and generalized text that cannot be tied to an obvious location in *Esther*. It advocates that the heart of those who seek the palm of

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<sup>810</sup> The likelihood of this position here is increased by Handel's insertion of material here in 1751.



victory must be like ‘a white lily, a virgin flower’. This can be interpreted as advice to be virtuous, without political or sexual corruption. The B section observes that preoccupation with duty makes one’s soul content. If the position of ‘Cor fedele’ in 1737 prior to the throne-room scene indicates a similar Italian insertion in 1735, then ‘Bianco giglio’ makes ample dramatic sense at this point if sung by Assuerus in character. The first line of ‘Spira un’aura’ implies that Carestini was singing about his own character rather than making general observations about Esther, and, although the text is not especially relevant to the plot, it reintroduces the King prior to the throne-room scene, and follows the trend initiated in ‘Quella fama’ of establishing Carestini as a wiser and more benevolent King in 1735 than Senesino had represented in 1732.

It is not certain how Carestini contributed to the throne-room scene, but it is highly likely that ‘Tua bellezza’ was included here.<sup>811</sup> Although all previous writers have assumed that the aria was sung by Conti in 1737, the presence of an interfering Israelite in the throne-room making approving noises about Esther’s impending seduction of the king is dramatically ludicrous and in bad taste (whether in Italian, or in its 1757 English version ‘May thy beauty’). The fact that ‘May thy beauty’ was sung by Mordecai in 1757 does not prove that ‘Tua bellezza’ was not sung in 1735 (and 1737) by Assuerus, for whom the Italian text makes perfect dramatic sense: ‘Your beauty, your sweetness, they will win for you the heart of the King, and each grace that you ask for, love will obtain for you.’ The consolation and encouragement of Esther in ‘Tua bellezza’ is an ideal practical substitution for the English airs ‘O beauteous Queen’ or ‘How can I stay when love invites’, which Carestini and Annibali are unlikely to have sung. If so, it is a particularly persuasive example of Italian castratos performing an adequate Italian aria text in character.

There are clearly dramatic incongruities and problems that arise from Italian texts in the 1734 *Deborah*, but it seems to me that the inserted Italian texts in the 1735 *Esther* are comprehensively better prepared from a literary point of view, all of them are relevant

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<sup>811</sup> It is very likely that ‘Tua bellezza’ was composed for Carestini in the 1735 *Esther* because he sang it in the contemporary revival of *Athalia* using the parody text ‘L’innocenza, la clemenza’.

to the oratorio; several have direct relevance to particular moments in the plot, and they occasionally introduce aspects of Assuerus as a dignified monarch that are lacking in the English librettos.

### Repositioned texts

Handel could also change the dramatic impact of a text by repositioning it a different context. In the 1733 draft of *Arianna in Creta*, II.iii did not contain an aria, but only a recitative conversation in which Teseo reveals to Alceste that Arianna is the daughter of King Minos, and assures Alceste that he loves only Arianna and has no desire for Carilda. Teseo expresses his determination to face the Minotaur and save his friends, and then leaves before Arianna enters to interrogate Alceste about Teseo's strange behaviour. This carries the action swiftly to the next important recitative, and helps the drama to have a quick pace without losing any important details of the plot. However, in 1734a Handel relocated Teseo's 'Salda quercia' (from II.x), creating an exit aria for the *primo uomo* soon after the extended accompanied recitative and lyrical larghetto arietta that he had sung at the beginning of Act II. Handel's decision to give Teseo another prominent aria might have been designed to display the range of Carestini's talent at three very different musical showpieces in quick succession: a dramatic *accompagnato* ('O patria!'), a gentle *arioso* as he falls asleep ('Sol ristoro'), and then, after a visit from Il Sonno prophesying the Athenian prince's glorious future, and a short chat to clarify his love-life with Alceste, a fully fledged heroic *aria di bravura* ('Salda quercia'). All of this music is of impressive quality, but the heroic resolve of 'Salda quercia' is only mildly pertinent to its new 1734a context:

The Forest Oak the Winter bears,  
And gathers Strength by being beat,  
It's Head amidst the Tempest rears,  
And does its utmost Force defeat.



My Heart no Fear in Peril knows,  
Courage by Disdain's increased,  
By Love enforc'd it stronger grows,  
And burns with double Fire my Breast.

Its simile text describes courage arising out of love, which is generalized enough to pass without an audience noticing the oddness of Teseo's comments. Perhaps the line about responding assertively to disdain is a reference to Tauride. However, the repositioned aria holds up the narrative in comparison to the faster flowing recitative only version. 'Salda quercia' works more effectively in its original position (II.x), after a particularly venomous outburst by Arianna (II.ix), who calls Teseo a 'False, cruel man', gives him vital information about how to navigate the Labyrinth and defeat the Minotaur, and persists that 'o'er my Heart you shall not prove victorious'. In 1733 Teseo responded with this subsequently unused recitative:

Ti saresti ingannato infelice Teseo? Nò troppo intesi. Mà che modi o che m'ami; alla mia gloria e all'amor mio convien ch'io vinca, o mora.  Salda Quercia, inertia balza [etc.]	[Teseo expresses misfortune that he has been misunderstood, and decides that the fate of both his glory and love depend on his victory or death]  The Forest Oak the Winter bears [etc.]
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When placed in its original context, it becomes clear that ‘Salda quercia’ is Teseo’s courageous reaction to Arianna’s disdain, and that he is like a sturdy oak tree that can withstand any (emotional) battering. Its text also conveys Teseo preparing mentally for his forthcoming ordeal in the Labyrinth. As both a response to Arianna and a look forward to his trial in the labyrinth, ‘Salda quercia’ is a much stronger dramatic statement in its 1733 position.

Its removal from II.x in 1734a left a gap, since Teseo requires an aria in which to respond to Arianna. Handel’s solution was another repositioned 1733 aria: Alceste’s ‘Al fine amore’ from the rejected III.ix. We cannot be sure that Handel had not already cut III.viii-ix when he moved ‘Salda quercia’ to II.iii, but it is possible that the need to replace it in II.x with a new aria could have caused the removal of the scenes for Carilda and Alceste at the end of the opera. Alternatively, the scenes might have been cut already, and Alceste’s aria was spare material ripe for use elsewhere. The text of ‘Al fine amore’ was adapted for Teseo, and Handel composed a new introductory recitative to fit its new context:

(recit) Love Sports with me in Ariadne’s Frowns;

I know she still is faithful in her Love,

I know myself sincere, and not a Traitor.

(aria) Love at last disturbs my Breast,

But less in Anger than in Jest;

He sports it with my Pain.



My Fair's too tender, and too true,  
Her Rigour further to pursue,  
And treat me with Disdain.

Handel's 1734a recitative text shows Teseo as more sensitive to the unfairness of his treatment by Arianna than in 1733. His aria text portrays him complaining, emotionally fragile and less assertive than the hero depicted in 'Salda quercia'. It could be argued that this series of repositioned arias for Teseo in 1734a presents a more varied personality and gave Carestini more opportunity to display his musical versatility, but 'Al fine amore' is less effective than 'Salda quercia',<sup>812</sup> and Alceste's 1733 expression that 'Love at last disturbs my breast' is entirely irrelevant to Teseo's already requited relationship with Arianna.<sup>813</sup> Furthermore, in II.x 'Salda quercia' creates a dynamic musical contrast with Arianna's lament 'Se nel bosco' at the end of Act II, unlike the comparatively insipid 'Al fine amore'. Also, the 1733 scheme strengthens the potency of Arianna's plaintive aria by giving her something more vivid and resolute to react against.

In the 1737 *Partenope*, III.iv (formerly III.v in 1730a) was drastically reshaped by two repositioned arias. Ormonte's 'Furibondo' (transferred from Arsace, II.ix, 1730a/b) and Armindo's 'La speme mi consola' (transferred from Emilio, III.iii, 1730a/b) were each given a slightly adapted text. Arsace's crazed reaction to Rosmira's renewed rejection of him now becomes an observation for Ormonte that has little or no apparent relevance to the situation. The original A section text, 'Furiously blows the wind, perturbing both the earth and skies' is retained without any alteration, and the new B section alternative text is tenuous: 'When put to such a test, an irate soul might be like that.' This is flimsy observation suggests that the text's adaptor was desperate to find some way to make the

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<sup>812</sup> This is also true of the music: 'Salda quercia' is in a bright major key, with animated quaver accompaniment, semiquaver vocal runs and a stoic/heroic character ideal for its 1733 context, but 'Al fine amore' has simple continuo-led accompaniment, a low level of melodic invention, and is a bland alternative.

<sup>813</sup> It is likely that Handel recognized that the addition of 'Al fine amore' in II.x did not work. He cut Teseo's scene in 1734b, but this was not ideal either because Arianna's unjust accusations require some form of response.

aria relevant. If so, the attempt failed miserably: it is not clear why Ormonte suddenly feels motivated to launch into a fully-fledged tirade expressing tempestuous emotion. The captain has just received instructions from the Queen to prepare the field of honour for the forthcoming duel between Arsace and Eurimene, has courteously responded that he will faithfully fulfil his orders, and has no motivation to lurch into a rapid E minor rage aria. Nor is it explained whose 'irate' soul he describes: it could be anyone, the vengeful Rosmira, beleaguered Arsace, or even an angry Partenope (if her preceding recitative has been performed in a feisty way). It seems conclusive that 'Furibondo' was recycled here as a vehicle for Negri's coloratura; it is musically incongruous to Ormonte's characterization as an obedient servant, and its text is dramatically irrelevant in its 1737 position.<sup>814</sup>

A few lines later, Partenope hints to Armindo that she now requites his love. His joyous response 'Nobil core' (1730a/b) seems not to have suited Conti voice.<sup>815</sup> Handel probably considered that Emilio's 'La speme ti consoli', in which the disgraced villain generously encourages Arsace to find consolation in hope, would be suitable here as a pertinent response to Partenope's line of recitative telling Armindo that he should hope. 'La speme mi consola' changes the text into a first-person expression entirely suitable for Armindo:

Hope consoles me and cheers up my heart.

Timidity flies away from me and Love shows himself propitious.

Great is my contentment for I triumph at last.

In the end torment is scattered when one knows how to love constantly.

The repositioned and adapted text is successful in its new position, although it can be argued that the unrestrained happiness of Armindo's 1730a/b aria 'Nobil core' is more

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<sup>814</sup> It is also notable that the 1737 position of 'Furibondo' creates a sequence of three consecutive arias rooted on the same tonal centre. While Rosmira's E minor 'Quel volto mi piace' is clearly a connected response to Arsace's tender 'Ch'io parta' in E major, the insertion of 'Furibondo' in E minor is uncharacteristic of Handel's usual tonal awareness.

<sup>815</sup> Perhaps its transposition to a suitable key would have made the flute part awkward to play, but Handel could have solved this problem by transferring the flute part to a violin



fitting for his response to Partenope. Now that he has clearly won her love, it is not literally correct that he needs to be consoled by hope. The revision also had a side effect: the removal of the scene in which the dejected Arsace provokes the sympathy of his fellow outcast (III.iii) was entirely cut in 1737, thus making Emilio's supportive relationship with Arsace almost nonexistent, and diminishing an audience's perception of his gentlemanly side.

The transfer of 'Barbaro fato, sì' from Emilio (II.ii, 1730a/b) to Armindo (II.vii, 1737) is also regrettable in its impact on both characters. Placed at the end of Act II for Armindo, the aria's enraged text lashing out at barbarous fate is an implausibly over-exaggerated statement about his unsuccessful wooing of Partenope, presented with barely any motivation. His conversation with Partenope in the preceding scene has been reasonably successful, at least in her kindness towards him.<sup>816</sup> The aria's reallocation to Conti was no doubt intended to provide him with a cliffhanger finish the opera's middle act, and perhaps it shows Armindo in a more passionate and assertive light. However, an improbable angry outburst contradicts Armindo's original characterization as a meek lover of commendable constancy, self-discipline and virtue. It is paradoxical that the addition of 'Barbaro fato, sì' to Armindo decreases our sympathy for him, whereas its inclusion for Emilio in 1730a/b attracts compassion from the audience for his bitter self-reproach. In 1737 Emilio's role is weakened without his anguished accompanied recitative and aria after his military defeat and capture. Overall, Handel's method of transferring and repositioning arias in his 1737 *Partenope* caused serious damage to one of the opera's most intriguing characters whilst adding nothing of dramatic value to another.

Handel's repositioning of texts also caused a bizarre incongruity in his makeshift version of *Esther* performed at Dublin in 1742. It seems that limited choral forces influenced him to omit *Zadok the Priest* from the end of Part 2, but his decision to bring forward 'Jehovah crown'd' and its concluding chorus 'He comes' from the beginning of

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<sup>816</sup> Perhaps Armindo's uneasy outburst is an agitated response to Rosmira's determination to arrange an audience with the Queen.

Part 3 makes poor dramatic sense. The excitable ‘He comes!’ heralding the coming of Jehovah, and perhaps also hinting that Assuerus will sort out the injustice suffered by the Israelites, is promptly followed by an interval that prevents anybody from arriving (apart from Handel, to display his brilliance in an organ concerto). Also, the abridged libretto and repositioned interval made Part 3 very short,<sup>817</sup> and the relocation of the splendid horns from the opening of Part 3 to the end of Part 2 reduced the musical variety presented in the oratorio’s final part.

### Abridgement of librettos

Cutting texts from revivals of old works, especially recitatives in operas, presumably saved Handel and his singers rehearsal time. Appendix 2b shows that he removed a vast amount of recitative from *Partenope* in 1737. These abridgements caused regrettable damage to ‘the best libretto Handel ever set’.<sup>818</sup> Almost without exception, the omission of small details or entire scenes removes attractive incidental colour, essential information about motivation, or valuable insights into the personality of characters. Rosmira’s appearance as ‘Eurimene’ and her fabricated report about how ‘he’ survived a shipwreck is reduced (I.ii), the omission of two lines before Partenope’s ‘L’ amor ed il destin’ diminishes her romantic attachment to Arsace, and fails to express her sentiment that Emilio’s military threat cannot disturb the peace in her heart (I.iii). The omission of three lines prior to ‘Se non ti sai spiegar’ (I.iv) obscures Rosmira’s resolve to encourage Armindo, and removes the context of the aria as sentimental advice. The aria becomes instead an incongruous response to her discovery that Arsace and Partenope are lovers.

Upon realizing that Eurimene is Rosmira in disguise, Arsace vows never to reveal her identity (I.v). This is the fundamental action that dictates the course of the opera’s principal plot, but the removal of fifteen lines of recitative means that Arsace’s vow lacks emphasis, and the first private conversation between the estranged lovers becomes

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<sup>817</sup> Handel’s Dublin revision of *Alexander’s Feast* was similarly affected.

<sup>818</sup> Dent: ‘Handel’s Operas’, pp. 44-5.



perfunctory. The omission of Arsace's aria 'Sento amor' obscures the fact that he still has tender feelings for Rosmira, which makes his acceptance of her later persecution of him, and his desire to be reconciled with her, less plausible. The omission of recitative removes a tender exchange between Armindo and Partenope (I.vii), and Rosmira's truncated recitatives in her feigned declaration of love for Partenope (I.ix) diminish our impression of her resourcefulness, reduces the antagonism she shows towards Arsace, and weakens the comic element of the scene. It also fails to provide the necessary degree of provocation for Partenope to leap to Arsace's defence in 'Sei mia gioia'.

Detail about the relationship between Emilio and Partenope, and particularly his ardent desire for her, are damagingly concealed by the omission of sixteen lines of recitative (I.x). In the following scene astonishment between the men about Partenope leading her own army against Emilio is minimized, whilst Rosmira's open mockery of the Queen's initial choice of Arsace passes without surprised remarks from Armindo and Ormonte. The omission of the last two scenes of Act I remove Arsace's amusing attempt to persuade Rosmira not to fight in the battle (he is unable to speak plainly to her in the presence of Armindo), and also Rosmira's explanation to Armindo that 'he' does not love Partenope, but is hunting an altogether different kind of prey.

The battle scene (II.i) remained mostly intact in 1737, but the omission of Emilio's line 'Io di tuoi Crini d' oro / Son Prigionier, e non d' alcun di loro' removes an intriguing ambiguity: is his reference to feminine golden curls of hair addressed to Partenope, or has he noticed there is something amiss about the inept fighter Eurimene? It might be the latter. Emilio refuses to acknowledge Eurimene's claim to have defeated him in battle (II.ii, 1737), and the suspicion that Eurimene is not what 'he' seems could be a substantial reason for the vanquished Emilio becoming the lone supporter of Arsace in Act III. Alternatively, if Emilio's line is addressed to Partenope it presents a touching impression of his genuine love for her. Whether this short statement is addressed to Partenope or Eurimene, its loss from Emilio's contribution in 1737 is dramatically significant. This is worsened by the

omission of his soliloquy (II.ii, 1730a/b), which conveyed his bitter realization that Partenope will never requite his love.

Vital incidents in Act II are obscured by Handel's abridgements of recitatives. Rosmira's attempt to take all credit for the victory over Emilio away from Arsace, her insolence towards Partenope, and the general reaction of astonishment by the other characters, are less thoroughly depicted (II.ii, 1737), and Partenope's 'Voglio amare' lacks the proper argumentative context it possessed in 1730; the Queen's command for Eurimene to be placed in prison does not seem as justifiable in 1737. Rosmira's unexpectedly stout defence of the absent Arsace to the baffled Armindo and Emilio is harmed by the omission of nine lines of recitative (II.iv, 1737), after which the insertion of the whimsical 'Si scherza sì' for Armindo is utterly nonsensical, and inflates his role in the middle of a scene that should be focused firmly on the disguised Rosmira, who is beginning to crack under the emotional pressure of her vendetta. Likewise, the difficult emotional dilemma presented in Arsace's petition for Rosmira's release from prison is undermined by the omission of recitative in which he attributes his sympathy for 'Eurimene' to some secret impulse that he cannot explain. Both the comic potential of this moment, and the depiction of his uneasy predicament, are lost in 1737. After Arsace's mysterious behaviour and seemingly inexplicable rebuttal of Partenope's advances, the following scene presents a contrasting gentle conversation in which Armindo shyly reveals to Partenope that he loves her. This scene is essential to the strand of the plot concerning whom Partenope will eventually marry, but its abridged 1737 version is inferior to the full 1730 text.

II.viii (1730a/b) is essential to the plot: Rosmira has been freed from prison, and requests that Armindo arranges a public audience with the Queen (who has instructed that she never wants to see Eurimene again) in order to reveal a secret of great importance about Arsace. This was not printed in the 1737 libretto, but M A/1039 f. 47 shows that it was not cut, and it is inconceivable that Handel omitted it from performance: it presumably paved the way for Armindo's 'Barbaro fato, sì', which may be tenuously perceived as an



agitated response to Rosmira's request, although it is incongruous in this respect because Rosmira's clear intention to denounce Arsace offers Armindo hope. However, the omission of II.ix (1730a/b) means that Rosmira's stinging rejection of Arsace's adamant profession of love, refusal to forgive him, and his emotional disorientation ('Furibondo') are all lacking in 1737, which causes serious harm to their well-developed characterizations in Handel's first version of the opera. It is also a structural defect: in 1730a each Act contains a significant private conversation between the estranged couple in which Rosmira is not in disguise, and Arsace is able to speak openly to her. In 1737 this private conversation is lacking from Act II.

The damage continued in Handel's revisions to Act III. Rosmira's self-awareness that her treatment of Arsace has become tyrannical, and her berating Armindo for criticizing Arsace, is omitted from III.iii. The scene in which Rosmira again scorns Arsace (III.iv, 1730a/b) is perhaps the most potent scene in the opera, in which Rosmira and Arsace are both portrayed in greater vulnerability. Arsace's sublime broken-hearted response 'Ch'io parta' shows his attitude to have intensified since 'Furibondo' at the end of Act II (1730a/b), but the removal of almost all the preceding recitative ruins the frankness of the conversation between the lovers. Without the full impact of these private feelings their eventual reconciliation in the *scena ultima* is less convincing. The omission of some recitative from III.vii (1737) removes Rosmira's fear that Partenope has overheard something that could compromise her disguise, which makes the abrupt launch into the trio 'Un cor infedele' less plausible. The reinstatement of Emilio's 'La gloria in nobil alma' (III.viii, 1737) required Handel to adjust its preceding recitative. Rather than adapt Armindo's part for Conti, Handel chose to make this scene a soliloquy for Emilio, which removes the valuable expression of friendship and an impression of amiability from both characters. The abridged *scena ultima* removes essential details, such as Arsace's reluctance to fight a duel with Rosmira, the responses of other characters, and even Rosmira's panicked response to Arsace's proposal that they fight bare-chested. Without

her expression of anxiety, Rosmira's decision to reveal her true identity is implausibly sudden and perfunctory. Furthermore, nobody seems sufficiently surprised at the revelation that Eurimene is really a woman in 1737. One might also consider that the comic value of the moment is weakened by rushed timing.

Handel's extensive cuts to the libretto of *Partenope* in 1737 were artistically disastrous, but Appendix 3b shows that he made few reductions to the libretto text of *Arianna in Creta* on its revival. Carilda's 'Dille che nel mio seno' (I.iii) was abridged to its A section.<sup>819</sup> In this scene, the young men and women of Athens, including Carilda, are led away by guards to be prepared for their sacrifice to the Minotaur. Carilda's aria is a statement to Teseo, but is clearly also for the benefit of the eavesdropping Cretans:

Say that I keep a noble Mind,  
From Fears and terror free,  
And from so fierce a Death I find  
Not chains, but Liberty.  
[B section] I gladly with my Fate comply,  
At least I will not basely die:  
Say that I go, yet don't complain,  
Nor Pity ask for all my Pain.

The text presents Carilda responding in a particularly dignified manner to a horrendous situation. It is one of the few moments in the libretto that portray her as an assertive heroine. The removal of the entire aria would have diminished Carilda's contribution to the opera, but its B section does not add any significant details to our understanding of Carilda's character, her relationships with others, or her situation. Carilda's noble bearing is still fully communicated in the A section, and the effect on the dramatic flow is also positive. Handel's musical setting is attractive but not outstanding: the violins double the

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<sup>819</sup> Probably in 1734b (see Appendix 3a).



voice throughout, and the full da capo aria makes the narrative drag at an early stage of the opera.<sup>820</sup> Handel's revision enables a quicker dramatic pace without any loss of characterization, narrative or musical expression.

Abridged da capo texts are also a feature of the 1732 *Esther*. The Cannons texts 'Praise the Lord with chearful noise', 'O beauteous Queen' and 'How art thou fallen from thy height' were all reduced to A sections. The former worked adequately without its B section: 'Zion now her head shall raise, Tune your harps to songs of praise' does not influence plot or character, and perhaps its location after the air 'Tune your harps' made Handel or Humphreys consider that only so many references to tuning harps were desirable within such a short passage of text.<sup>821</sup> However, the removal of the da capo might have been influenced by Handel wanting to restrict the use of solo harp, or simply by the air's length.<sup>822</sup> The loss of the da capo repeat is regrettable because of Handel's lively writing for solo harp, but the omission of the B section text has no dramatic impact on the oratorio, and the single statement of the A section still achieves its musical novelty. It has been argued that Haman's last aria is 'greatly strengthened' by the removal of its da capo,<sup>823</sup> but the reduction of Assuerus' 'O beauteous Queen' is less successful. It was presumably abridged to limit the amount that Senesino had to sing in English, but the original Cannons B section clarifies that Assuerus will grant Esther's request. This fact is of vital importance in the oratorio plot, but is not explicitly stated in the 1732 libretto.

A notable abridgement of the Cannons text is the compression of the oratorio's long final chorus 'The Lord our enemy has slain'. Some valuable detail is lost, especially the prominent proclamation by the Jews that they will rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Lines in the solo sections of the Cannons text such as the bass duct 'Mount Lebanon his firs resigns, Descend, ye cedars, haste ye Pines, To build the temple of the Lord, For God

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<sup>820</sup> The duration of this aria is over four minutes in both recordings of *Arianna in Creta* (see Bibliography).

<sup>821</sup> The abandoned B section text became useful in 1757 when it was used for the new duct and chorus 'Sion now'.

<sup>822</sup> It lasts about five and a half minutes (timing based on recordings of *Esther* cited in Bibliography).

<sup>823</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 91.

his people has restored' could be ironically interpreted as exactly the sort of attitude that provoked Haman to irritably complain 'They boast, their God will plead their Cause, Restore their Temple, and their Laws' (I.ii, 1732). However, in the Old Testament no mention is made of the Jews wishing to return to Jerusalem or to build a temple.

Humphreys, a serious scholar and author of a hefty commentary on the Bible, might have objected to a conclusion that was an unnecessary fictitious divergence from the scriptural source. Alternatively, Handel's 1732 version might have been a deliberate decision to avoid the elaborate verse anthem style, perhaps with the simpler short chorus serving as a makeweight for the insertion of two large-scale coronation anthems.

The addition of solo 'Alleluia' sections to 'The Lord our enemy has slain' in 1732 might have influenced the dramatic presentation of characters. In the printed libretto the solos are allocated to Mordecai, but Handel almost always assigned it to the singer performing Assuerus.<sup>824</sup> The 'Alleluia' solos work equally well for either character: Mordecai, in celebration of deliverance and the blessings bestowed upon him, or Assuerus, in acknowledgment of the God of Israel.<sup>825</sup> Handel's allocation of the solos to his *primo uomo* Senesino in the finale produces a symmetrical balance with the 'Alleluia' for his *prima donna* Strada in the opening scene. Handel would not have considered assigning such a prominent climactic contribution to a secondary character, nor to Francesca Bertolli (who sang Mordecai in 1732).

Most of Handel's abridgements to *Esther* in 1742 damage the coherence of the plot and the musical fabric of the oratorio. It is arguable that he was right to cut Esther's superfluous and obstructive 'Alleluia' (I.i), but the roughshod removal of essential text from the conversation between Haman and Assuerus (I.ii) means that Haman's vendetta against the Jews lacks clarification, and the removal of his subsequent air 'Pluck

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<sup>824</sup> The only exception was in 1737, when Annibali's long Italian insertion shortly prior to the finale probably influenced Handel to assign the 'Alleluia' solo passages to Conti instead.

<sup>825</sup> Conversely, there is sufficient evidence that soloists were not always 'in character' during oratorio choruses. Senesino's contribution to 'The Lord our enemy has slain' might have been similar to John Beard's contribution to the elegy in *Saul* mourning the death of his own character Jonathan.



root and branch' is arguably the single most harmful of Handel's cuts in the oratorio's performance history. Handel's dissatisfaction with this compromise for the Dublin performance is transparent in his partial reinstatement of I.ii in 1751. This version restored most of the 1732 libretto, though it is curious that Handel cut Assuerus' first lines so that I.ii commences with Haman's recitative 'O King, for ever live'. This obscures Assuerus' opinion that Haman possesses virtues that deserve reward, removes his specific invitation for the villain to freely propose his petition, and also increases our perception of Haman as an unpleasant sycophant. I doubt that Handel's consciously intended to make Haman more dislikeable and Assuerus appear less foolish, but the removal of only two lines of recitative creates exactly this impression.

Some of Handel's artistically successful abridging is evident in the 1733b revival of *Deborah*. He made extensive cuts to the slow-paced oratorio, no doubt principally to make it easier to prepare for a single performance at Oxford with an almost entirely new cast of soloists, and perhaps a substantial element of new instrumentalists and choral singers. Notwithstanding the paramount importance of practical considerations to Handel working on a tight schedule, it is possible that he also recognized that *Deborah* could become faster-paced and thus more dramatically convincing if pruned of some padding. His awareness of the artistic benefit of some cuts might be implied by his retention of several of them in many later performances.

In 1733b Barak's recitative 'Since Heaven has thus its will express'd', the chorus 'For ever, to the voice of prayer', Deborah's invocation 'By that adorable decree', and the solemn chorus 'Oh hear thy lowly servant's prayer' were cut from the long first scene. It is noticeable that nothing actually happens during this considerable chunk of the original libretto. The recitatives and choruses grouped together in this omitted section had conveyed the piety of Israelites devoted to Jehovah: Barak invites the Prophetess to implore Jehovah's aid, the chorus switches to pious mode, Deborah prays, and then the chorus humbly reiterates its petition to divine power. However, all of this contradicts the

sentiment of the preceding chorus, which boldly proclaims 'Forbear thy doubts! to Arms! away! / Thy God commands, do thou obey.' Also, the Israelites have already established their prayerful credentials in a grander request for divine assistance in the oratorio's opening chorus. Therefore, all the omitted movements are superfluous to the narrative, which suggests that Handel desired to get the plot moving forward more quickly. The removal of all text between 'Forbear thy doubts' and Deborah's recitative 'Ye sons of Israel' avoids clogging up the story with short incidental minor-key choruses that present exactly the same dramatic sentiment at length, and instead leads directly into Deborah's encouragement that Israel shall prosper in battle against the Canaanites. Handel astutely retained some of this abridgement in all of his later performances.

His most notable abridgement for the Oxford *Deborah* seems to have been the structural merging of Parts 1 and 2 together. Owing to the removal of 'Despair all around them', the printed libretto implies that he ended Part 1 with Deborah's recitative 'Let him approach pacifick, or in rage', but it is inconceivable that he would have broken off for an interval with only a simple recitative: Handel always finished an Act of a music theatre work with a chorus, aria, or ballets. If the composer divided *Deborah* into two parts for concert performance in Oxford, such a drastic amendment would have enhanced the dramatic urgency of the situation described in the libretto. In 1733a, Part 1 finished weakly with an anticlimax when the Herald's invitation for the Israelites to negotiate with Sisera is accepted, and Humphreys ends the act soon afterwards 'for no valid reason':<sup>826</sup> Barak contributes a confrontational recitative which is a suitable cue for a brightly courageous collective statement from the Israelites that they do not fear their aggressors. In the event, 'Despair all around them' fails to portray this attitude: the E minor music places the impression of despair firmly upon the chorus of Israelites rather than their enemies. It is likely that Humphreys tailored the text to fit the solemn music, and his text 'Transports of joy our praise shall employ' is infinitely more appropriate for the dramatic moment than

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<sup>826</sup> Dean: Op. cit., p. 226.



Handel's music. The composer might have been more successful had he composed a new chorus to Humphreys' words.

It seems that Handel recognized this problem, perhaps during the first run of performances. In revivals of *Deborah* during the 1740s and 1750s he found a different solution, but for 1733b he might have devised the unusual solution to lead from the simple recitative at the end of 'Part 1' straight into the chorus 'See the proud chief advances now' (which opens 'Part 2').<sup>827</sup> Thus in 1733b 'Part 2' is actually a continuation of 'Part 1'. If so, this solution is a vast improvement: it sustains the dramatic momentum from the Herald's confrontation through to Sisera's arrival; the invitation to parley is promptly followed by the actual encounter between heroes and the villain, without a dramatically-redundant large chorus in an inappropriate style and the obstruction of an interval.

Some texts among the casualties are not a great loss: Barak's 'Impious mortal' is openly defiant and indignant towards Sisera, but Handel's self-borrowed music is incongruously subdued. Instead of concentrating on evoking conflict with the impious Sisera, the music instead implies how extraordinarily righteous Barak is. The removal of this ineffective moment in 1733b avoids reiterating the same manner of pious indignation that Deborah expresses more effectively during 'In Jehovah's awful Sight'. Also, the omission of 'Impious mortal' creates a swifter-flowing sense of narrative and avoids monotonous musical moods that interfere with what should essentially be a confrontation between heroes and villain. It is a pity that Barak does not have an opportunity to deliver his colourful lines to Sisera that the Lord will send 'plagues and vengeance without measure' upon his enemies, but the air's omission creates a stronger connection between the Canaanite contributions in 1733b: Sisera's 'Whilst you boast the wond'rous story' flows directly into the Chief Priest of Baal's bragging, and the chorus 'O Baal! Monarch of

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<sup>827</sup> It is possible that for the London revivals in 1734 and 1735 Handel concluded Part 1 with the recently composed D minor organ concerto movement (Op. 3 no. 6, last movement), connected to the D minor 'Alleluia' from *Athalia* that he used in this position in all revivals of *Deborah* from 1744 until 1756.

the skies'. From several perspectives, Handel's decision is generally beneficial to the pacing of the drama.

Deborah's recitative after the chorus 'Lord of eternity' was reduced from six to two lines for Oxford, which causes her invocation of the name of God to be omitted. It is curious that this abridgement, like the removal of her accompanied recitative 'By that adorable decree', produces a portrayal of Deborah as a tribal leader rather than spiritual Prophetess. However, the shorter two-line recitative 'Fly, I conjure ye, from this place, too sacred for a throng so base!', in which Deborah sends Sisera away, is a more convincing dramatic verisimilitude. Her dismissal of the Caananite captain is now curt, less enshrouded in mystical language, and balances neatly with his two-line response 'We go, but ye shall quickly mourn, in tears of blood, our dire return.'

Similarly, the cancellation of the Israelite Woman's recitative 'Oh Judah, with what joy I see' and air 'No more disconsolate, I'll mourn' in 1733b removes another halt to the action, and helps the libretto flow from one decisive action directly to another without hindrance. The Israelite Woman's moderate C minor air scarcely evokes the relief and optimism its text implies, and it is significant that Handel omitted it from most subsequent revivals. It seems that Handel and Humphreys perceived no meaningful distinction between Jael and the Israelite Woman (the same singer always sang both roles), and perhaps the composer felt that one air for the Jael / Israelite Woman singer towards the close of the long first part was perfectly sufficient. If so, it is not surprising that he preferred the more animated and striking G minor air 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing', in which controlled agitation insinuates that Jael feels some trepidation about the forthcoming battle that her text does not mention, to the non-descript digression caused by 'No more disconsolate I'll mourn'.

The examples discussed above suggest that in many important respects the 1733b Oxford *Deborah* is better paced and stronger from a theatrical point of view than the longer 1733a original. However, some other 1733b abridgements are untidy and



dramatically problematic. The omission of the chorus 'O blast, with thy tremendous brow' and the reduction of Deborah's preceding recitative turns this section of I.i into a conversation with Barak that is confusing nonsense: his pioneering statement in favour of sexual equality appears bizarrely off-topic without Deborah's explanation that a woman will be Israel's hero. At least some of the Oxford audience could fill in the gaps in the narrative with the aid of the complete text in the printed wordbook, but the sung text is incoherent. Handel realized his mistake, and reinstated the last two lines of Deborah's recitative and the chorus in all his subsequent revivals.

It is peculiar that in 1733b Handel removed almost all of the essential information about how the Israelites defeat Sisera and the Canaanites from the sung text. Jael's sixteen lines of recitative reporting how she assassinated Sisera were cut, despite being the only text in the entire libretto that fully explains how the enemy meets his fatal end. Instead, her celebratory air 'Tyrant, no now more we dread thee' follows Barak's rushed announcement that she has killed Sisera. Jael's important recitative text clarifying the outcome of the story was printed in the wordbook, and perhaps Handel assumed that the intelligent members of his Oxford audience knew the story already, but it is curious that he carefully removed almost all mention of Jael's decisive action from the performance. Deborah's earlier prophesy that the Canaanite captain would 'perish on the crimson Sand, / Ignobly by a woman's hand' (I.i) was cut, and so were four lines of recitative when Deborah again alludes to future events when she tells Jael 'Thy virtue, ere the close of day, / Shall shine with such a bright display, / That thou shalt be, by all, confess'd / Thy sex's pride divinely bless'd.' (I.ii).

Handel's consistent and apparently deliberate obscuring of Jael's allegedly heroic deed, at least in performance if not in print, is difficult to explain. The probability that the cut was retained in 1734 and 1735 makes it unlikely that this abridgement was merely an

expedient decision for his Oxford performance.<sup>828</sup> It has been proposed that Jael might have seduced Sisera using her sexual charms, much as Judith seduced Holofernes in the similar Apocryphal story that was the subject of Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha Triumphans* (RV 644). In a descriptive synopsis accompanying his recording of *Deborah*, conductor Robert King wrote:

Fleeing from the battle, Sisera came to Jael's tent, hoping to be concealed there. Jael, instead of providing 'water from the limpid brook' went one further and gave the warrior 'milk ... in a copious bowl' – perhaps a biblical allegory for rather more sensuous services? Sisera, exhausted certainly by the battle, if not also by his beautiful hostess, fell asleep, and Jael seized the opportunity to nail his head to the floor with a tent peg.<sup>829</sup>

If this innuendo was plausible for eighteenth-century readers, perhaps Handel's omission of Jael's report was a form of self-censorship to avoid unsavoury sexual connotations. It seems unlikely to me that the orthodox Protestants Handel and Humphreys would have intended to imply an immoral carnal deception by the virtuous heroine, and the biblical source contains no hints whatsoever that can support the theory that Jael seduced Sisera. The salacious double-entendre in Jael's report of her deed is probably a uniquely modern interpretation. However, one of Handel's inserted texts in his 1744a performing version raises further ambiguity about this. Deborah's air 'May Heav'n attend her with each charm', adapted from *Esther*, is placed in the final scene of Part 2:

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<sup>828</sup> Handel rightly reinstated Jael's full report in 1744. With a cast that could all sing comfortably in English, he was able to reinstate many of Humphreys' texts. Handel's concern with shortening *Deborah* in the 1730s was no longer a priority in 1744, by which time his audience had become accustomed to hearing longer concerts of English music theatre works, including dramatic oratorios and odes based on texts by Milton and Dryden.

<sup>829</sup> See Bibliography for discographic information.



Deborah singing about Jael in 1744a	Israelite Woman singing about Esther in 1732
May Heav'n attend her with each Charm, His rising Fury to disarm; Thus shall the Tyrant's bosom prove That each Passion yields to Love.	Heaven has lent her every Charm, Rising Fury to disarm; And the Monarch's Breast will prove, That each Passion yields to Love.

The *Deborah* parody text is almost identical. The observations that Sisera will be disarmed by Jael's charms, and that he will yield to love, seem to support an insinuation that Jael vanquishes Sisera using her sexual allure rather than by mere guile or opportunism. Such a reading of the text is probably misconceived: it is unlikely that an argument in favour of Heavenly power influencing carnal behaviour would have been theologically acceptable in the eighteenth century, and it is equally unlikely that such a sentiment would have been deliberately assigned to Mrs Cibber, whose reputation had been damaged by scandalous divorce case a few years previously.<sup>830</sup> Perhaps Robert King's modern interpretation has a grain of eighteenth-century authenticity, but it is plausible that Deborah's inserted air was chosen and prepared in haste, and that the retention of the original sentiment from its original context, about Esther seducing Assuerus into granting her request, was erroneously retained owing to oversight.

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<sup>830</sup> Burrows: *Handel*, p. 265.

### **Part Three: The Effect of Musical Revisions on the Drama**

Libretto texts dictate what a character or chorus literally 'says', but Handel's music exerts control over what they 'mean' and 'feel'. His musical choices were influenced to some extent by a need to present his singers in the best possible light, but all of his theatre works contain incontrovertible evidence of his outstanding ability to use music in order to portray psychological and sentimental characterization. Handel's musical rhetoric dictates how an audience senses a vast range of dramatic situations, including: heroic military action, personal moral courage, villainous aggression, pride, humility, stubbornness, diplomatic awareness, indecision, unrequited love, rejection, unbridled lust, sincere love, fear of death, remorse, tyrannical rule, reconciliation, bidding hopeless farewell, encouraging advice to another character, anxiety, madness, piety, modest virtue, helplessness, vanity, gloating, enlightened realization, arrogance, optimism, supernatural visions, heartbreak, frustration, loneliness, political machinations, magical incantation, sarcasm, tenderness, lamentation, rage, self-reproach, indignation, jealousy, loyalty and jubilation.

Many of Handel's music theatre works contain carefully plotted trajectories during which characters encounter many of these experiences, often in conflict with other characters (perhaps simultaneously), in response to one another, or in reaction to events. Moreover, characters frequently progress towards an advanced psychological state by the end of the drama. Such rites of passage and evolving characterizations are supported in Handel's music, and this makes it inevitable that alterations to the score have a direct musico-dramatic consequence.

#### **Taking music away**

The case studies explored in the dissertation contain numerous examples of musical movements or sections being omitted from revivals. The musico-dramatic consequences of such revisions are frequently regrettable. The revisions for Handel's 1734b revival of



*Arianna in Creta* were not particularly extensive, but the musical quality and dramatic richness of the opera was reduced by the loss of three arias: Tauride's 'Mirami, altero in volto' (I.i) and 'Qual leon' (II.vi), and Alceste's 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' (II.xii). 'Mirami, altero in volto' (1733/1734a) has a function of paramount musico-dramatic importance as the first prominent musical gesture of the opera. It features a full four-part orchestral accompaniment, and the opening ritornello and the declamatory vocal entry of a descending fifth on a dotted rhythm immediately establish Tauride's arrogance (*HG* p. 8). Its proud opening statement, which may be colloquially interpreted as 'Look at me!' was no doubt an appropriate way in which Handel's former star mezzo-soprano Durastanti could be re-introduced to London audiences in her first newly-created (male) role of the 1733-4 season. Perhaps Handel's assertive and impressive composition was intended to announce her return to the King's Theatre stage in a charismatic fashion: the quality of Handel's integrated contrapuntal accompaniment and panache of the vocal writing indicates that he maintained high regard for the singer, and it seems that he entrusted her with the important job of setting the tone of his new opera, and grabbing the attention of his audience.

However, in the 1734b revival Handel replaced 'Mirami, altero in volto' with the newly-composed 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' for the contralto Maria Caterina Negri. As discussed previously, each of Tauride's alternative opening aria texts is successful in its presentation of the character as a conceited bully, but Handel's music in 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' is adequate rather than excellent. The extension of most vocal phrases across the bar-lines produces a lilting effect that demonstrates Negri's vocal agility, and the semiquaver passages effectively illustrate the text referring to Tesco's words being scattered upon the wind (*HG* p. 11), but the *tutti unisoni* accompaniment often doubles the vocal part, which is less interesting than the music in 'Mirami, altero in volto', and perhaps implies that Handel needed to support Negri in a practical manner that was probably unnecessary for Durastanti, even if the latter's vocal powers had faded by 1734 in

comparison with her heyday a dozen years earlier. The brief duration of 'Del labbro tuo gli accenti' suggests that Handel did not regard the aria as an especially important aspect of his 1734b revival. His substitution did not harm the opera's dramatic coherence, but a greater abundance of musical interest and demonstrative rhetorical communication is evident in 'Mirami, altero in volto'.

Tauride's characterization is similarly damaged by Handel's treatment of 'Qual leon'. Its abridgement in 1734a and complete omission in 1734b are both regrettable revisions. It depicts important characteristics of Tauride's personality: the simile which Tauride uses to compare himself to a furious lion seeking its lost young conveys his defiant vengeful attitude towards Teseo, and his assertion that his foe possesses a 'haughty' attitude is a dramatically appealing hint of blatant hypocrisy. Handel's decision to give a heroic musical vocabulary, with an orchestral accompaniment including horns, to the arrogant villain is deliberately ironic, and cleverly creates a strong impression of Tauride's swaggering belligerence. This impression is intensified by the B section, in which Tauride ponders that he might calm down if Carilda (who is not present) responds favourably towards his lustful desire for her. It is amusing to observe the hapless Tauride attempting to impersonate a lover whilst in the middle of an enraged military aria, and Handel's music in the B section has a hint of sympathy for the bully's futile desire in its radically different tone and style. In a brief section lasting only fourteen bars, the relative minor key, courtlier rhythms, and the simpler scoring of unison violins, illustrate that Tauride has obvious difficulty in speaking more tenderly about the women he professes to love. Handel's rising sequence on 'pace, calma', followed by a long held 'pace' under an echo of the sequence played the violins, present a warmly affectionate characterization of his inability to calm himself down (*HG* p. 65). We almost feel sorry for Tauride until he launches back into his blustering rant in the da capo, which gains extra force and dramatic emphasis from the contrast of the B section interlude.



Handel's truncation of 'Qual leon' diminished Tauride's musico-dramatic characterization in 1734a, but its entire omission in 1734b was much worse; it deprived the Covent Garden audience of a superb musical composition featuring flamboyant orchestration, and weakened the entertaining characterization of Teseo's only physical enemy. Dean called this aria 'a showy piece dependent on brilliant scoring with a cornucopia of braying horns, oboes and bassoons, but otherwise unremarkable.'<sup>831</sup> This dismissive verdict underestimates the musico-dramatic value of 'Qual leon', a remarkable aria that is without doubt musically delightful, witty, and a penetrating psychological study.

I also disagree with Dean's criticism that Alceste's 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' 'contributes nothing to plot or character.'<sup>832</sup> This long aria was omitted in the 1734b revival of *Arianna in Creta* because the role of Alceste was adapted for the tenor John Beard, and octave transposition of the vocal part would have created a murky clash between the voice and cello obbligato. However, its necessary omission was lamentable from an artistic point of view. 'Son qual stanco pellegrino' had been conceived as a showpiece for both Scalzi and the cellist Caporale, but its musico-dramatic roots are deep. The solo cello serves as a metaphorical illustration of the aria's text. Alceste compares himself to a lost traveller who is plagued by doubt, but is looking for a friendly guide to set him upon the right path, and as the aria progresses, the cello's increasingly sympathetic connection with Alceste's voice can be interpreted a musical personification of the supportive guide he seeks (*HG* p. 74). Handel's music magnificently conveys Alceste's emotional journey. Such simile texts are frequently conventional soliloquies without implicit dramatic connotations, but Alceste addresses his aria to Carilda, who has rejected his love. In her preceding recitative, Carilda has harshly told Alceste 'Fate is to blame, then on it lay the fault, if to such offices I prove ungrateful.' Carilda's futile denial of Alceste in favour of Teseo (who does not love her) is the catalyst for 'Son qual stanco pellegrino',

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<sup>831</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 264.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263. However, Dean rightly praises the music's 'broody, almost romantic flavour.'

which is either sung directly to her or is at least a direct reaction during which she remains present. Its poignant music is a crucial development of the subplot, with Handel investing Alceste's sole opportunity to woo Carilda with a notably extended moment. The aria marks the sentimental turning-point in the relationship between Carilda and Alceste: by the end of the aria an audience might speculate whether the silent Carilda is able to preserve her disdainful emotional distance from Alceste. 'Son qual stanco son pellegrino' is a subtle form of sincere seduction rather than an ordinary lament. Handel's music transcends the libretto text, and its pathos – reinforced by the simple elegance of the upper string parts – suggests an emotionally profound moment with multiple dramatic readings.

'Son qual stanco pellegrino' also has a practical structural function. Handel's music is substantially greater than is required for its narrative context with a secondary character contributing to the subplot. It is the longest aria in the opera, apart from Arianna's lament 'Se nel bosco', and it is likely that Handel deliberately placed both of these extensive arias (each in a sublime pathetic style) close together at the end of the opera's middle act. These emotionally probing arias produce a double-barrelled expression of emotional uncertainty and pessimism in both strands of the plot, leaving all the conflicts within the drama unresolved at their emotional peak. *Arianna in Creta* is a less satisfying opera without 'Son qual stanco pellegrino': the resolution of the subplot is weakened, the eventual union of Alceste and Carilda has less motivation, the dramatic tone of the latter stages of Act II has less emotional power, and the audience is deprived of one of Handel's finest musico-dramatic realizations of the simile aria convention.

Some valuable arias were cut from Handel's 1737 version of *Partenope*. The truncation of Act I caused the omission of Rosmira's 'Io seguo sol fiero' (I.xiii). The scene shows Rosmira, disguised as 'Eurimene', assertively stating that 'he' has feigned desire for Partenope, and reassuring Armindo that 'he' is seeking a different kind of prey. The splendid hunting aria reveals more of Rosmira's ambition to bring the philandering Arsace to justice than has hitherto been portrayed, but it also shows her trying to seek credibility



for her disguise by assuming a 'masculine' musical style. Rosmira has heroic intentions, and the music supports that in a literal way with robust orchestration and lively coloratura, but Handel's music is also like a humorous parody, particularly in the way that the theme is first introduced by joking oboes before horns take over with the same material (see bars 1-6 of the full eighteen-bar ritornello version in Appendix 2d).<sup>833</sup> The music gently mocks Rosmira's posturing as 'Eurimene', but it also serves to consolidate her stature as a courageous heroine determined to exact revenge from the man who has deserted her. The omission of the aria in 1737 deprived the audience of a distinctive style of music not represented elsewhere in the opera, but it also robbed Rosmira of her biggest 'heroic' moment, diminished her importance by removing a prominent 'cliff-hanger' climax at the end of Act I, and left her characterization much less interesting.

Another significant dramatic aria in the original 1730a score of *Partenope* was 'Nobil core' (III.v), which presents the meek Armindo's joy that his adversity in love is over now because Partenope requites his love. Handel's music is scored for solo flute, strings and continuo, and the dance-like impression of the movement is enhanced by the predominant use of triplets (*HG* p. 103). The D major aria trips along merrily, which provides a superb contrast with the fallen Arsace's following G minor lament 'Ma quai note' (which features two flutes). The key relationship and different use of similar scoring suggests that Handel planned for these arias to form a pair of movements in which the elation of a happy lover (Armindo) is directly contrasted with the abject despair of a less fortunate character (Arsace). The happy 'Nobil core' is a notably effective moment of optimism which throws the sufferings of others into light relief, owing to its position amidst the disappointment and frustration afflicting almost all of the other characters. The aria is musico-dramatically perfect for its context, but in 1737 Handel replaced it with the contemplative A major aria 'La speme mi consola'. Its text, adapted from Emilio's 'La speme ti consoli' (III.iii), effectively communicates Armindo's pleasure that Partenope will

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<sup>833</sup> *HG* p. 46 contains the shorter four-bar version, which removes this witty device and instead has horns and oboes entering simultaneously.

marry him, but its music is a much less suitable vehicle for the character to express his unrestrained joy: the elegant music created for Emilio's advocacy of hope now seems to offer Armindo little more than complacent contentedness. Moreover, the loss of 'Nobil core' also weakens the context of Arsace's subsequent lament.

The dramatic quality of English oratorios could also be affected by Handel's removal of particular movements. Two choruses were cut from the 1733a version of *Esther*. The libretto text of the eloquent short chorus 'Ye sons of Israel mourn' (I.v) contributes nothing that needs to be stated more than once, but in the original Cannons version and the 1732 version it was performed twice, midway through the scene and at the conclusion of the act. Handel's eloquent C minor adagio music was restricted in all subsequent versions of *Esther* to its sole appearance at the end of the act, but the impression of the Israelites' suffering is stronger when the reiteration emphasises their mournful mood. Handel's removal of the chorus's first statement in 1733a diminishes this effect, and a single statement at the end of the act is a perfunctory and slender conclusion: the music has less opportunity to grow in emotional stature, and makes a less credible impact than the repeated lamentation of the original scheme.

Greater damage was caused by the omission of 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' because it was the only choral representation of the Persians (I.ii). In many of his later oratorios Handel excelled at contrasting the vibrant yet idolatrous pagans with the sublime religiosity of the Israelites. Although 'Shall we the God of Israel fear?' is not as fine an example as the revelling Babylonians in *Belshazzar* or the gloating Philistines in *Samson*, it successfully conveys the Persians' cheerful hedonism and their disrespect for the God of Israel. The fugal treatment of the line 'nor age nor sex we'll spare' (*HG* vol. 40, p. 15) invites the impression that the derisory Persians are mocking those whom they seek to slaughter. The loss of the chorus from *Esther* weakens the characterization of the aggressors, and its reinstatement in the 1733b Oxford version suggests that Handel regretted cutting it in 1733a. It was never omitted again.



In contrast, Handel's compression of over-long choral movements could be advantageous. In the 1740 version of *Esther* he abandoned the solo 'Alleluia' passages in the final chorus 'The Lord our enemy has slain', and for the first time confined the music to an entirely choral statement that is concise and direct. The simplification of the music in 1740 cannot be attributed to a lack of a suitable soloist, because Beard had sung a version of the 'Alleluia' solos in 1736. However, we cannot discount the possibility that Beard and Handel were dissatisfied with the 1736 solution. The florid solo originally prepared for Senesino was probably adapted for Beard in a similar way to the makeshift manner in which the conclusion of the recent Wedding Anthem 'Sing unto God' had been based on music composed for Carestini in *Parnasso in Festa*, and it might have been an unsuccessful experiment. Alternatively, it seems likely that Handel wanted to shorten and simplify the oratorio's conclusion, perhaps feeling that it was not necessary to provide a different solo option each time the cast for *Esther* changed during the mid-1730s. The compact choral version of 'The Lord our Enemy has slain' removed any future need for Handel to rewrite it again, but the simpler version of the music persuasively achieves its purpose without superfluous fussiness.

Likewise, the final chorus of *Deborah* was cropped to good effect in 1744. Although Handel clearly wished to optimize the grandeur of the oratorio for his King's Theatre revival, he considerably shortened 'Let our glad songs to Heaven ascend', and there were benefits from a tauter choral conclusion: the music of the middle section, adapted from *The king shall rejoice*, is not particularly convincing in a celebratory final chorus, and its removal makes the chorus straightforward and conclusive. The shorter form of the chorus also allowed room for the effective insertion of the duct 'I'll proclaim the wondrous story' (from the 1732 *Esther*), which would have otherwise risked turning the last scene of the oratorio into a ponderous and lumbering anti-climax.

Sometimes cuts improved the dramatic pace of a scene. The music Handel assigned to Senesino in *Deborah* consistently miscast the castrato's character Barak as an

introspective and sentimental personality, and failed to present the energetic hero which Humphreys projects in the libretto, eager to prove his bravery and unhesitating in his resistance to the villainous Sisera. The text of Barak's 'Impious mortal' (I.'vii', 1733b) provides an injection of animated courage into proceedings:

Impious Mortal, cease to brave us,  
Great Jehovah soon will save us,  
And his Time we wait with Pleasure:  
All his People he'll defend,  
And on their Oppressors send  
Plagues and Vengeance without Measure.

Barak's words are openly defiant and indignant towards Sisera, and convey forceful righteous anger. Humphreys presumably prepared his text to fit music from the *Brockes Passion* that Handel had already decided to re-use, but it is a pity that the composer wasted the opportunity to employ more exciting means to illustrate a text mentioning the impending plagues and vengeance that were to be heaped without measure upon Sisera. However, Handel's slowly-paced music is incongruously solemn. Marked 'Largo, c staccato' and set in C minor, the four-part string counterpoint unfurls in five-bar opening ritornello, and the steady vocal writing fails to imply any emotion for Barak beyond moralistic musing and cautiousness (*HG* p. 117). Perhaps Handel felt that it was necessary to give preference to Senesino's comfort singing in English above dramatic characterization. Alternatively, Handel might have wished to characterize Barak with the sort of dignified piety that characterizes the original version of the music in the *Brockes Passion*. In its *Deborah* context the music of 'Impious mortal' is counterproductive to dramatic impact, and Handel decision to omit it in revivals between 1733b and 1744a improved the theatrical flow of the scene: the removal of Barak's pious indignation means



that he does not needlessly hold up the action with a reiteration of the same sentiment that has just been expressed in Deborah's 'In Jehovah's awful sight'.

Another case of an over-repetitiveness was trimmed from this scene in 1733b: Handel seems to have realized that the Jael / Israelite Woman singer only required one air towards the close of the long first part. The dull C minor music of the Israelite Woman's dull 'No more disconsolate' poorly illustrates the relief and optimism implied by its text, and it is not surprising that Handel preferred to retain Jael's more extrovert 'O the pleasure my soul is possessing'. The quicker pace and enhanced contrast between characters in the 1733b scheme of this long scene is a considerable dramatic advantage.

It appears that Handel occasionally removed choral music from *Deborah* when he was dissatisfied with his work. 'For ever to the voice of prayer' (I.i) is a brief contrapuntal chorus that resembles a miniature verse anthem in the solo lines for four singers (*HG* p. 54), but it was never performed again after 1733a. Handel might not have wanted to waste time on rehearsing it at Oxford, and perhaps it was dramatically sensible to reduce the long opening scene, but it is surprising that he never reinstated this finely crafted music. Its loss seems regrettable, but we can speculate that Handel would have restored 'For ever to the voice of prayer' in 1744 had he rated it more highly. It is similarly revealing that he evidently chose not to include the chorus 'Despair all around them' in the conclusion of Part 1 after 1733a. The bright G major music of the following 'Alleluia' (*HG* p. 92<sup>f</sup>) formed a good conclusion, but the mournful tone of the preceding E minor larghetto opening section – taken from the middle passage of the coronation anthem *Let thy hand be strengthened* – was bizarrely inappropriate for this position in the oratorio (*HG* p. 92<sup>b</sup>). It seems that 'Despair all around them' was simply omitted from the 1733b Oxford version: the shortened first and second parts of the oratorio were probably connected together, which was an intermediary improvement. In this instance, it may be speculated that not

having music at all was better than having anticlimactic music in this position that was dramatically nonsensical.<sup>834</sup>

The chorus 'All your boasts shall end in woe' was probably cut from the 1734 version of *Deborah* because it would have required Carestini and Negri to sing short solo lines in English. Dean opined that the chorus is one of most convincing moments in *Deborah*,<sup>835</sup> but it seems that Handel did not think so. The composer never reinstated the chorus in any of his later versions of *Deborah*. Dean proposed that this was because Handel 'seldom had enough singers to do it justice',<sup>836</sup> but this seems unlikely: Handel's casts in 1744, 1754 and 1756 contained enough singers who were capable of performing the few tiny solo lines in a chorus that is neither technically challenging or musically imposing. Handel probably considered that 'All your boasts' was an unsatisfactory experiment not worth reinstating.<sup>837</sup>

### Adding music

The insertion of material, either newly-composed or old music adapted for a new context, influenced how an audience perceived some characters in Handel's music dramas. The addition of Armindo's 'Bramo restar' (I.vii), derived from *Muzio Scevola*, in the 1737 revival of *Partenope* is a notably successful example.<sup>838</sup> In the original 1730a version Armindo is a meek and disciplined suitor whose character is delineated by three tender arias. Handel's use of insertions in 1737, which doubled the character's quota of arias, was dramatically unsuccessful when the music sought to convey a more virile 'manly' champion, but 'Bramo restar' strengthens Armindo's contribution to the early stages of the

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<sup>834</sup> In 1744, if not earlier, Handel replaced the misfiring parody of his coronation anthem with a strongly characterized, quick, and unambiguous 'Hallelujah' that had originally been used to conclude Part 1 of *Athalia*.

<sup>835</sup> 'Here there is conflict ... the head-on clash of two temperaments, two bodies of opinion. ... the piece is entirely dramatic, and a portent of things to come' (*Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, p. 230).

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>837</sup> Handel had composed *Samson* by the time *Deborah* was next revived with an ideal cast for an all-English performance in 1744. In *Samson* the chorus 'Fix'd in his everlasting seat' concludes Part 2 with a much finer example of conflicting parties arguing about whose God is best.

<sup>838</sup> It was successfully integrated into staged performances of the 1730a version performed at Innsbruck in February 2000.



opera by establishing his credentials as a lover capable of eloquent musical communication, albeit in a way that is entirely consistent with his hesitancy and fear of rejection. The melodic beauty and the pathetic style of the siciliano effectively portray Armindo's tender longing for Partenope, and the frequent sustained pauses (in the adagio sections halfway through the A section and the opening of the B section, after which the larghetto is resumed) illustrate his hopelessness, desperation and shyness (*HG* vol. 64 p. 33-4). The musical structure tenderly supports the description of Armindo's aria in the 1737 libretto: 'He wou'd depart from her, but love stopp'd him against his will.'

Burney praised the music of this aria, in its original context in *Muzio Scevola*, as 'the most pleasing and agreeable of all Handel's charming Sicilianas',<sup>839</sup> and observed that the original singer Berselli 'must have been high in the composer's favour of taste, as he is left to himself in no less than six ad libitums and adagios, which he had to embellish.' Presumably Handel had comparable esteem for Conti in 1737, who might have maximized the musical opportunities for lyrical embellishment. There are two crucial aspects of the insertion's successful context in *Partenope*: 1) it does not disturb the existing recitatives in the scene; 2) the music is not derived from an essential defining moment for another character.

Increased tenderness from a beleaguered lover is also a characteristic of the most successful addition to the 1734a version of *Arianna in Creta*. In the 1733 draft version of the opera Teseo's arias were all in a conventional virtuoso heroic style. Dean described Teseo's role as 'the first part Handel wrote for ... Carestini, and he evidently put himself out to gratify singer and audience with a spectacular display of pyrotechnics', and dismissed most of the music as 'hollow scales and mechanical divisions: much glitter but little substance ... they suggest a singularly flatulent hero.'<sup>840</sup> Handel added music to the 1734a version that contradicts Dean's harsh assessment of Teseo's allegedly one-dimensional characterization: 'Sdegnata sei con me' (I.xi) is a graceful E major larghetto

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<sup>839</sup> Op. cit., p. 714.

<sup>840</sup> *Handel's Operas 1726-1741*, p. 261.

that reveals a gentler aspect of the hero, and is his only 'love' aria in the opera. Its sentimental style, sweetly established in the first unison violin figure of the short three-bar ritornello, is a musical style entirely different from the rest Teseo's music (*HG* p. 32). The extended melodic phrase, with an imploring musical gesture in bars 3-4, is remarkably different from the *coloratura* in 'Nel pugar' and 'Salda quercia'. The music suggests a sincere and emotional character attempting to placate his lover while simultaneously reassuring her of his love. Handel's addition of 'Sdegnata sei con me' substantially enhanced Teseo's personality, expanded the musical variety of his arias, and also provided an opportunity for Carestini to demonstrate musical and dramatic talents that were neglected in the 1733 version. 'Sdegnata sei con me' is the single most valuable and successful performance revision that the composer made for *Arianna in Creta*, and its careful placement and musical content suggest that he consciously sought to improve his previous scheme for I.xi (which in 1733 contained the duet 'Bell' idolo amato', portraying uneasiness between the lovers). Arianna's silence during Teseo's emotionally sensitive 'Sdegnata sei con me', and her subsequent lively A major aria 'Sdegno amore', convey in 1734a that she is more inclined to give Teseo the benefit of the doubt than she had been in 1733. Therefore, Handel's alteration of I.xi meant that the climax of Arianna's jealousy was reserved until it could appear more realistically provoked and intensely depicted at the end of Act II.

In the 1744a version of *Deborah* the addition of the new air 'Cease, o Judah, cease thy mourning' (I.v) enriched the character of the Prophetess. This was the first version in which the title role was not performed by Strada; Francesina seems to have sung the original 1733a music without difficulty, but the added music makes Deborah's characterization more rounded and likeable. 'Cease, o Judah, cease thy mourning' is an extrovert C major andante containing extended divisions in the virtuoso vocal part, which conveys optimism and feminine charm (*HG* vol 5, p. 125). It is curious that the unreservedly Italianate *coloratura* was the first such music ever assigned to the title-heroine



in the history of the oratorio.<sup>841</sup> Handel's addition brings assertive musical attributes to prominence in a scene that was formerly a distinct anti-climax lacking musical and dramatic distinction. Together with the new choral ending - also using music taken from *Athalia* - the 1744a scheme for the conclusion of Part 1 is certainly Handel's best solution.

The composer added more material transferred from *Athalia* in his 1744 performances of *Deborah*. The air 'My vengeance awakes me' (I.iv 1744a/b) was assigned to the Herald in both versions of the printed libretto, but the choice of music was probably influenced by the involvement of John Beard, who sang Sisera. However, the insertion caused a paradox of dramatic advantages and problems. It would have been dramatically absurd for a lowly Herald to depart from the scene vowing vengeance against those described as his personal foes. Also, it would have shown an unusually casual regard for dramatic sense if Beard had sung the Herald in character, and then angrily departed having just elaborately announced his own impending return as a different character Sisera. It is improbable that the Herald was somehow represented in 1744 as Sisera in disguise attempting a provisional parley with the Israelites, but it is plausible that Handel contemplated the insertion of 'My vengeance awakes me' in order to give Sisera an earlier entrance.<sup>842</sup> This would have established his character sooner and more strongly than his isolated appearance in earlier versions of the oratorio. The Herald's original recitative text would have been an effective statement emerging from the pompous Sisera's own mouth: 'My charge is to declare from Sisera, a name renown'd in war, that he with indignation knows, how you presume to be his foes.' If this is interpreted as Sisera boastfully referring to himself using the royal "we", it successfully conveys his conceited arrogance.

However, such a reading of this scene is made incongruous by the subsequent recitatives, which are unchanged from all previous versions. Barak's line 'Go, let the

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<sup>841</sup> Handel borrowed the music from an earlier version prepared for Strada in the 1735 revival of *Athalia* ('Through the land so lovely blooming'), although this had been based on the rejected aria 'Bramo di trionfar' from *Alcina*, where the music was intended to convey Carestini's masculine heroism.

<sup>842</sup> If so, then a double encounter between Sisera and the heroes resembles Harapha's confrontations with the title-hero in *Samson*.

boaster hear' does not suggest he makes his statement to the 'boaster' himself. Similarly, the line 'Tell him, besides, that Judah now prepares for interview or battle' was not amended. There is more awkwardness in Deborah's line 'Let him approach pacifick, or in rage'. All these responses imply that Sisera has not yet arrived, although Deborah's recitative can also be read as a general dismissive response to a visit from the Caananite captain that might have just occurred. Also, it seems premature for Sisera (and excessive for the Herald) to proclaim aggressively that 'compassion forsakes me' when that sentiment cannot be a justifiable response until after the confrontation in II.ii. If 'My vengeance awakes me' was intended for Sisera, it appears that the revision was not fully thought through, overlooking necessary alterations to the recitatives of other characters, and failing to correct the allocation of 'My vengeance awakes me' to the Herald in the librettos.

From a purely musical point of view, the insertion of 'My vengeance awakes me' is advantageous. It is an animated rage aria, the coloratura is furious but concise, and Handel's vivid orchestral writing provides a badly needed moment of undiluted virile confrontation in the pedestrian first part of *Deborah* (HG vol 5 p. 142). Burrows opined that the *Athalia* music adapted for Beard 'works well enough, though the solo part at times becomes rather entangled with the basso continuo. Nevertheless Handel must have been more or less satisfied with the arrangement, since the aria was also sung in other contexts' on numerous occasions.<sup>843</sup> Beard sang Sisera again in all of Handel's subsequent revivals, but the omission of 'My vengeance awakes me' in 1754 and 1756 suggests that Handel recognized that the air's insertion in 1744 had created unfortunate dramatic inconsistencies.

Music added to the role of Jael in 1744a was poorly integrated from a dramatic point of view. The libretto text of 'Flowing Joys do now surround me' (I.ii) is a logical response to Deborah's revelation that God will ensure Jael's protection during the battle,

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<sup>843</sup> Burrows: *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, Oxford, 2005, p. 327.



and is a parody of Jael's original aria in this position ('To joy he brightens my despair'). Instead of transposing Jael's original music down for Mrs Cibber, Handel chose to transpose down an entirely different soprano air transferred from a different oratorio. In *Esther* the music in 'Flatt'ring tongue' vividly conveyed the title-heroine's angry scorn of the condemned villain Haman. Although borrowed musical material can have contradictory characterizations in different contexts, on this occasion the match between Handel's music and Jael's 1744a words was misconceived. The spiky music suggests that the singer is bothered about something, which is distinctly inappropriate for Jael's appreciative sentiment that she is filled with joy at her promise of safety from danger.<sup>844</sup>

The 1744a insertion of Jael's 'All his mercies I review' (III.iii) is dramatically incongruous. The text shows Jael innocuously announcing that Jehovah has blessed her with safety and victory, but the gentle leisurely music – taken from *Athalia* - insufficiently illustrates the urgency of her news. After the sombre chorus 'Doleful tidings', in which the Canaanites bemoan the loss of their captain Sisera, Jael should ideally appear eager to share important news, but instead she digresses from the narrative with delicate music that seems implausible for a woman who has just driven a nail through the villain's head, and she takes her time in languid fashion.

However, the insertion of 'I'll proclaim the wond'rous story' before the final chorus was a more convincing addition to *Deborah* in 1744a. The duet, written for the 1732 *Esther*, has a vaguely celebratory text and a generic musical character of moderate contentment. It seems unremarkable in isolation, but it resolves the action in *Deborah* with an appealing impression of a happy ending. Handel's retention of it in all his subsequent performances suggests that he preferred the new scheme of the oratorio's final moments to the original scheme, in which Barak's sombre 'Low at her Feet' and Deborah's reverential accompanied recitative 'O great Jehovah' produced a less buoyant and less cheerful effect.

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<sup>844</sup> It seems that Handel recognized that this addition did not work; he removed the problematic *Esther* insertion from the 1744b version, and instead transposed Jael's original aria down a fifth.

Although Handel frequently transferred music from one oratorio to another, he seldom used arias from his Italian operas in oratorio revivals. The adaptation of 'Piangi pur' from *Tolomeo* into Barak's 'Hateful man' in the 1756 revival of *Deborah* was a notably successful example. In *Tolomeo* the aria comes at a climactic moment near the end of Act 2: Araspe, the tyrannical king of Cyprus, has discovered that the woman he lusts after is married to his enemy Tolomeo and, vengeful towards them both, Araspe orders his guards to bind Tolomeo in chains. The aria is addressed to Tolomeo:

Weep, but no Hopes e'er entertain,  
That you can any Pity gain,  
Or mollify my Wrath with Tears;  
A Sea of Tears it would require,  
Nor would that serve to quench the Fire,  
Where Jealousy appears.<sup>845</sup>

Transferred to Barak in I.iv of *Deborah*, the music is a bustling D minor allegro that conveys Barak's angry confrontation with the Herald (see Appendix 5e). The opening vocal statement immediately establishes the scornful tone of the singer's role, full of adamant reiterations of 'Hateful man', and the combination of the declamatory vocal line with running semiquavers throughout the Violin I part (probably performed *tutti unisoni*, with oboes doubling) is an effective vehicle for Barak's reinforced characterization as a hero who is actually capable of heroic deeds (an aspect of his role which had been scarcely credible in the 1733a role created for Senesino). The success of this musical addition to *Deborah* is no doubt based on the choice of source, presumably made by Smith jr, perhaps in consultation with the elderly and blind Handel. The music is smoothly integrated into its new context, not least because the D minor tonality of the music fits neatly between the G major chorus and C major aria on either side. Curiously, the rhetorical tone of music

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<sup>845</sup> English translation of 'Piangi pur' from 1728 printed libretto of *Tolomeo*.



conveying a villain's rage at the hero in 1728 was fully transferable to portraying the hero's rage at the villain in 1756.

Strada's 'Alleluia' added to the opening scene of *Esther* in 1732 was lifted without alteration from the concluding movement of *Silete venti*, although it was originally composed as the conclusion to *Saeviat tellus*.<sup>846</sup> Handel's music forms a spectacular finale in both motets, but it is dramatically nonsensical as the first contribution of the title-heroine in the oratorio, where Esther launches into a six-minute Alleluia after a brief seven-bar recitative. The 12/8 presto contradicts her characterization as a virtuous beauty, seeming like an ecstatically conceited jig rather than a modest response to her coronation as Queen of Persia (*HG* p. 20). Esther's first aria ought to have concentrated on her character rather than Strada's brilliant vocal technique. There is insufficient dramatic motive or musical justification for this unbalanced introduction to the heroine; its extrovert rejoicing seems inflated and presumptuous for this early context without any preceding music to establish her character.<sup>847</sup> Senesino's 'Alleluia' solo in 'The Lord our enemy has slain' had a logical dramatic context in the oratorio's finale, but Strada's 'Alleluia' is premature, nonsensical, and is a titanic obstruction to the plot. It expresses very little about Esther, and contributes nothing of obvious musico-dramatic value.

The ludicrousness of Esther's unprovoked outburst of ecstatic religious fervour was diminished when Handel re-assigned 'Breathe soft, ye gales' to her in 1733a, which at least enabled her first musical statement to possess greater individuality and substance. He persisted with the 'Alleluia' as a showpiece for every revival in which Strada participated, but it seems likely that the composer recognized the pertinence of a review that satirically

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<sup>846</sup> Its extraordinary continuo instruction 'Tutti bassi del concertino Cembali, Teorba, Harpa, Violoncelli, due Contrabassi, due Bassoni, ecc., senza Organi e Ripieno' reveals that Handel had a particular and unusual timbre in mind for the opening ritornello of the *Esther* version (Cfm MU MS 251 p. 36).

<sup>847</sup> In contrast, the substantial 'Hallelujah' chorus that concludes I.i in *Saul* is entirely justified because it represents the Israelites celebrating David's victory over Goliath.

reported how 'Strada gave as a Halleluiah of half an hour long'.<sup>848</sup> The 'Alleluia' was cut in 1742, and never reinstated.

The dramatic impact of the opening scene of *Esther* was also hindered by the insertion of the coronation anthem *My heart is inditing*. The anthem contains fine music but it does not fit its new context. At 320 bars it is inordinately too long to be absorbed seamlessly into the dramatic structure of the oratorio: the extensively splendid pomp of the music seems grossly swollen beyond the proportion of a chorus for such an early position in the drama. Neither its music nor its text adds anything of importance to the plot, apart from a pertinent reference to 'The king shall have pleasure in thy beauty'; but this is only a nominally relevant text that matters less to the plot than its political association with Queen Caroline, with whom the flattering comparison to Esther could have been intended.<sup>849</sup>

It has been suggested that the anthems inserted into *Esther* 'are mere padding to give an impression of novelty and size, and they slow up what little action there is'.<sup>850</sup> This is an accurate assessment of *My heart is inditing*, but the parody version of *Zadok the Priest* is more convincing in its theatrical context. It is by far the shortest of Handel's four coronation anthems, and is ideally proportioned for a new conclusion to Act II. The text makes clear dramatic sense as a grand choral conclusion in praise of King Assuerus, who has just granted Esther her request. The teasing succession of rising arpeggios, explosive grand choral entrance, and resounding reiterations of 'God save the King!' make a vivid theatrical impact.

Handel did not always strive for deeper characterization in his musical additions. Assuerus's 'Endless fame' (I.ii) is one of the few newly-composed movements for the 1732 *Esther*, and is the only one that has extrovert vitality. The lively music is marked Andante, although the tempo marking belies the speedy floridity produced by the multitude of semiquavers and demisemiquavers for unison violins in its six-bar ritornello (*HG* p. 35).

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<sup>848</sup> 'See and Seem Blind', *Deutsch*, p. 301.

<sup>849</sup> Such a conscious attitude is plainly evident in Samuel Humphreys' dedication of the *Deborah* libretto to Queen Caroline in 1733.

<sup>850</sup> Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 207-8.



Typically for a castrato's first aria of the evening, the initial vocal phrase features a long held note followed by a burst of coloratura; there is a striking similarity between the first two bars of Senesino's 'Endless fame' and Carestini's 'Nel pagnar' in *Arianna in Creta*. Handel's vocal writing demands considerable agility from the singer (*HG* p. 38), and 'Endless fame' is reminiscent of the heroic arias that abound in Handel's operas. It is essentially an operatic aria for Senesino that tells us little about Assuerus, apart from perhaps a tenuous implication in the intricately cheerful music that the Persian king is naively placing his trust in Haman.

The other addition to Senesino's role for the 1732 *Esther* was 'Thro' the nation', in which Assuerus expresses his gratitude to Mordecai. Dean approved of this insertion, called it a 'telling stroke', and claimed that in the Cannons version 'Haman's reflections on the danger of ambition come a little too pat upon his fall; now we can imagine him standing numb throughout the jubilant air and chorus, and only then uttering his awful warning to the tyrants of the future.'<sup>851</sup> I propose an alternative reading of the scene. The Cannons scheme is poignant on account of its unpredictable plunge into the macabre 'How art thou fallen', which firmly shifts the dramatic focus onto the despairing Haman's loss of power. An air for Assuerus might seem inevitable after his recitative 'Guards, seize the traitor, bear him hence', but Handel may have deliberately avoided the obvious solution in his first version of the oratorio. The 1732 revision is perfunctory and the music of 'Thro' the nation' is an unpersuasive self-borrowing: the basso continuo figuration that wittily illustrates the text 'Let rolling streams their gladness show' in *Eternal source of light divine* is overblown in its new context, and the added music is nothing more than a superfluous flourish for Senesino.

Handel's last version of *Esther* in 1757 included two new soprano airs, both scored for unison violins and continuo. The Israelite Woman's 'How sweet the rose' (III.ii) and Esther's 'This glorious deed' (III.iii) feature bland music that seems uncharacteristic of

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<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

Handel (see Appendix 4e). Both additions lack charismatic power musically and are dramatically redundant. It is impossible to comprehend what necessary reason there might have been for J.C. Smith jr to insert 'How sweet the rose' and 'This glorious deed'.

Handel's authentic alterations to *Esther* always had a practical motive, even when artistically questionable, but these 1757 additions do not appear to have been enforced by limited resources, rehearsal problems, political issues, singers who required transposition or alternative airs for a role previously written for a different vocal register, or Italian members of the cast who could not sing convincingly in English. 'How sweet the rose' and 'This glorious deed' rank as the weakest and most futile revisions made in nearly forty years of the oratorio's performance history under Handel's supervision, regardless of any ambiguity about who actually composed them.

However, the addition of the duet and chorus 'Sion now her head shall raise' to the 1757 version of *Esther* was a genuine adornment to the attractiveness of the oratorio as a musical entertainment. This G major andante has a thicker orchestral texture than the contemporary soprano airs, with four-part strings, and a particularly lyrical use of solo cello during the duet (*HG* vol 22 pp. 96-7). The neatly designed interaction between the two soprano voices features a pretty flowing melody. After a leisurely introduction for strings, the two solo voices combine for only forty-two bars, and the remainder of the long movement is an elegant five-part chorus. The choral writing is harmonically adventurous, and the orchestral scoring is expanded by the addition of oboes and bassoons. The word 'praise' is poetically illustrated by a long phrase of running quavers that are scored for tenors and basses doubled by bassoons, moving together in thirds for seven bars before the higher choral voices and oboes take over the material and complete the passage (*HG* p. 100). It seems certain that 'Sion now her head shall raise' was the elderly Handel's last authentic composition. If so, it was a magnificent final testament to his musical imagination.



## Re-assigning music

Handel frequently transferred arias from one character to another in revivals of his theatre works. In the 1733a version of *Esther* he made several changes that adjusted the dramatic stature of the title-role. Although the musical content of the overall oratorio was almost identical to the 1732 score, the composer discreetly transformed Strada's contribution by re-allocating three important airs to her from the Israelite Woman. The music of 'Breathe soft ye gales' had already been adapted from *Silete venti* for its new context with considerable sensitivity. The intensity of the stormy sinfonia at the beginning of the motet was replaced with a shorter and gentler pastoral introduction that immediately establishes a languid, exotic and wistful musical mood that evokes Esther's femininity. Handel's new seven-bar introduction is scored for two recorders, two oboes, two bassoons, seven-part strings and continuo including theorbo and harp, and its ravishing harmonic richness conveys Esther's attractive femininity from the outset of the action (*HG* pp. 10-11). It is an elegant musical illustration of the beauty that will appeal to the King. Moreover, the re-allocation of 'Breathe soft ye gales' to Esther enables a more varied and convincing portrait of her character.

In 1733a Esther also gained 'Tune your harps', which further enhances her role by placing her at the centre of the Israelites' shared experience of worship and hopefulness (I.iv). In 1732 Esther seems to observe and react to the scene from a distance, but this unfortunate impression of detachment from events is remedied by 'Tune your harps'. Although it is easy for us to imagine that Strada was glad Handel gave her some more charming music at another soprano's expense, the composer's decision also prevented the anonymous cipher-like Israelite Woman from having two consecutive airs, both with prominent obbligato parts,<sup>852</sup> and made the Queen appear much more strongly rooted in her Jewish community and adherence to the faith. The plaintive solo oboe, pizzicato string

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<sup>852</sup> Oboe in 'Tune your harps' and harp in 'Praise the Lord with chearful noise'.

accompaniment, and relaxed tunefulness of the vocal part (*HG* p. 42) become a significant contribution to characterization when the air is sung by Esther.

Likewise, Esther's acquisition of 'Heaven has lent her every charm' (II.iv, with its text modified as 'Heaven! O lend me every charm') transforms an obtrusive third-party observation into an effective first-person statement in which she prays for help to seduce her husband into granting her request to spare the Jews. The impression of Esther's virtue is increased by her own delivery of the text, as she openly credits God with the necessary power to sway the King's decree. This modesty protects her from a possible accusation that in 1732 she knowingly uses her own powers of sexual persuasion to persuade her husband, without God having much to do with it. Esther's prayerful attitude, despite being expressed after she has already survived her unsolicited approach to Assuerus, shows that she has not yet taken her victory over Haman for granted. Furthermore, we can imagine that the long vocal phrases featuring triplets and trills galore (such as the phenomenally long and technically difficult phrase on *HG*. p. 83) would have suited Strada's voice.

The effective transfer of 'Heaven! O lend me every charm' probably meant that Esther's 'Tears assist me' (II.ii) was considered superfluous and it was omitted in 1733a. It might seem strange that the moment when Esther prepares herself to approach the King did not receive an air in 1733a, but Handel's bland G minor music for 'Tears assist me' is curiously under-par. It is one of his few unsuccessful borrowings from the *Brockes Passion* for the original Cannons version of *Esther*, and its cancellation does not damage Esther's characterization because 'Heaven! O lend me every charm' conveys an identical dramatic sentiment, albeit in a later position. Handel reverted to his 1732 division of music between Esther and the Israelite Woman after Strada left his company, but the revised version employed for her role between 1733a and 1737 is by far the more effective dramatic scheme.

Handel's alterations to the role of Jael for Mrs Cibber in his 1744 performances of *Deborah* caused him also to redesign the title-role for Francesina. Jael's 1733a air 'Tyrant,



now no more we dread thee' (III.iii) was reassigned to Deborah, who sang it in a slightly later position instead of 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed'. Perhaps the soprano vocal part could not be satisfactorily adapted for Mrs Cibber's alto voice, but the composer's decision to transfer it to Deborah and to locate it closer to the end of the oratorio is dramatically stronger. It makes greater dramatic sense for Deborah to pass judgement that Sisera's 'insolence is o'er' instead of Jael, who seems to exceed the boundaries of her political role when proclaiming this text. The music features a vocal entry on a falling fourth ('Tyrant'), and upward leaps give special emphasis to the word 'insolence' (*HG* p. 196), and suits Deborah's authoritarian status as both political leader in the plot and prima donna in the performance. It appears that Handel recognized that it would have been counter-productive for Deborah to sing two large consecutive arias expressing similarly gleeful sentiments in 1744. The jaunty 'Tyrant, now no more' was positioned as the bold centrepiece of the final scene, and Deborah's 'The glorious sun shall cease to shed' proved to be an ideal replacement for the Israelite Woman's under-enthusiastic 'Now sweetly smiling peace' (III.i). Deborah's A major andante conveys radiant optimism (*HG* p. 200), and is better suited to its early position because it allows Deborah scope to increase the intensity of her contributions as the drama concludes. The 1744 adjustments improved the dramatic flow and impact of Deborah's role during Part III, especially in 1744b when Jael's obstructive 'All his mercies I review' was cancelled.

The transference of music from one character to another was minimal in Handel's different versions of *Arianna in Creta*, but the 1737 revival of *Partenope* included several examples where he undermined excellent characterizations that had been evident in his original 1730a version. The reallocation of Arsace's E minor rage aria 'Furibondo spira il vento' (II.ix, 1730a) to Ormonte (III.iv, 1737) produced a dramatically unconvincing situation in which the captain of Partenope's guard launches into an aggressive tirade without any apparent motivation, and with tenuous relevance to the discussion between characters that has preceded it. The transference to Ormonte also created a monotonous

sequence of three arias in a row that were rooted on the same tonal centre (see Appendix 2a). The 1730a scheme featured a sympathetic connection between Arsace's pathetic lament in E major and Rosmira's response conveying her increasing self-doubt in E minor; another E minor aria afterwards in 1737 for an emotionally unrelated character is uncharacteristic of Handel's usual care to produce varied tonal progressions between scenes. Moreover, the removal of 'Furibondo spira il vento' from Arsace cancels a vital moment of musico-dramatic significance. The animated E minor allegro, with rushing semiquaver unison strings and violent coloratura (*HG* p. 85), conveys the 'furious blast' that Arsace experiences from Rosmira's repeated cruelty towards him, whilst perhaps also containing an element of self-reproach because he knows that he deserves to be punished for his infidelity. The music tells us nothing about Ormonte in 1737, but it had provided a compelling psychological insight into Arsace's fragile state of mind at the climax of Act II in 1730. One of the aria's recurring musical ideas is a strong quaver downbeat followed by descending semiquavers (e.g. the second bar of the vocal part). Handel hinted at the same musical figure briefly in part of the extensive accompanied recitative for the mad scene 'Ah! stige larve' at the end of Act II in *Orlando*;<sup>853</sup> his music in *Partenope* has a similar dramaturgical function, and suggests that Arsace's tormented confusion is dangerously close to madness. The loss of 'Furibondo spira il vento' from Arsace in 1737 is made more regrettable because his characterization had already been diminished in 1730b by removal of 'Fatto è amor' (III.viii), an F minor outburst in which he cynically complains about 'tyrannick love'. Both arias are outpourings of frustration that has built up during his silent ordeals. Without either of them in 1737 the *primo uomo* character is robbed of opportunities to express his unrestrained emotions about Rosmira's persecution of him, and his gradual move closer towards resolution and reconciliation with her is diminished because he never appears to be truly assertive during the opera.

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<sup>853</sup> The line 'ogni terribile' in the section commencing 'Già latra Cerbero' (*HG* vol 82 p. 66).



The musical portrayal of Arsace's character trajectory from smug favourite lover of the Queen to penitent lover of Rosmira that had been evident in 1730 was probably sacrificed in order to increase Armindo's quota of arias in 1737. Instead, the end of Act II in 1737 has a volatile outburst for Armindo, but this is musico-dramatically problematic for several reasons. His aria 'Barbaro fato, sì' (II.vii, 1737) had conveyed Emilio's lowest emotional ebb (II.ii, 1730), but the angry bitterness of the music undermines Armindo's original characterization as a quietly steadfast lover and calmly heroic winner fully worthy of Partenope's love. Thus the transfer of 'Barbaro fato, sì' from Emilio to Armindo weakens the dramatic credibility of both roles in 1737. In its original context the aria had conveyed that the egotistical Emilio had been defeated in humiliating fashion and had lost all hope of winning Partenope's love through valour. In 1730 Emilio was forced to feel the despair of unequivocal personal rejection, but instead of a pathetic lament his simple 13-bar accompanied recitative was followed by a vivid G minor allegro (*HG* p. 61). The imploring musical setting of the words 'povero amore' communicates Emilio's bitterness to the audience, but this potent emotion seems alien to Armindo's gentlemanly character (as it appeared in 1730). Also, such a reaction seems wildly illogical after Armindo's reasonably successful encounter with Partenope (II.vi, 1737). The removal of this fundamentally important music from Emilio also obscures the motivation for his relationship with Arsace during the rest of the opera, because his brutally honest self-examination gives him stronger authority to offer advice to his fellow forsaken victim. This example of revision damaged the musico-dramatic integrity of *Partenope*.

### Italian additions to English oratorios

Few assessments of Handel's bilingual oratorio performances have been attempted in the extensive literature and abundant research devoted to the composer. It seems that the absence of fair discussion devoted to analyzing their artistic impact tacitly implies either a lack of interest or disapproval. Dean confined his remarks about the bilingual *Esther* to a

succinct summary of the aria titles dating from the mid-1730s, but his comment concerning the 1732 version of *Acis and Galatea* suggested a specific scepticism about bilingual versions: 'Handel's 1732 Serenata was a preposterous affair' and thrown together using 'excerpts from several other works, sacred and secular, without bothering to fit them into the context'.<sup>854</sup>

Handel's bilingual version of *Deborah* featured no new additional music, but his several Italian additions to *Esther* in 1735 merit more scrutiny than a dismissive assumption that they are half-baked curiosities. The occasional pragmatic use of Italian texts was a significant aspect of the composer's London performances during the 1730s (and as late as the December 1744 revival of *Semele*), and there is no known contemporary record of objections to it from his audience, who were already used to hearing music dramas performed entirely in a foreign language, with the assistance of an English translation parallel to the Italian text in the printed word-books.

New Italian arias added to the 1735 version of *Esther*, and the innovative inclusion of an organ concerto, increased the musical diversity of a remarkable concert entertainment. The libretto text of Assuerus's 'Angelico splendor' does not seem dramatically irrelevant to *Esther* because it has an obvious reference to the title-character, but it is not clear in which position the aria was performed.<sup>855</sup> Handel's dance-like A major allegro was tailor-made to display Carestini's voice advantageously. The vocal part requires considerable technical dexterity: sequences of repeated notes flow into long lines of coloratura, and occasional arpeggios and dotted rhythms make this an elaborate virtuoso aria of considerable distinction (*HHA* I/12.2 p. 307). Handel's application of extended coloratura falls with sympathetic emphasis on key words such as 'rischiari' (i.e. illuminate) and 'splendor'. Unison violins are used to brilliant effect with florid semiquaver figurations, although the effect is judiciously varied in some passages in which the violins divide into separate parts and support the vocal part with repeated-quaver chords.

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<sup>854</sup> Op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>855</sup> It might have been in the middle of I.iv (see Appendix 4c).



Like 'Angelico splendor', 'Tua bellezza' has an extrovert and adventurous character. This was the only newly-composed Italian addition that was not based on one of Handel's old compositions; its text informs Esther that her beauty and sweetness will 'win the heart of the king', and that each grace she asks for will be obtained by love. Although it seems that the king is referred to in the third person, it is not fanciful to interpret this as a bit of poetic licence: 'Tua bellezza' is obviously sung by Assuerus in character, and is an Italian replacement for 'O beauteous Queen' during the throne-room scene (II.iii). Extensive brilliant coloratura illustrates the meaning of the words, especially the word-painting of 'vincerà' ('will win'), packed with fiendishly difficult semiquaver divisions strongly reminiscent of a heroic opera aria (*HHA* I/12.2 pp. 264-5, bars 20-26).<sup>856</sup> It lacks the sensitivity of the slower 1732 music in 'O beauteous Queen', with its lyrical vocal part and warm orchestration including bassoons, but on its own terms 'Tua bellezza' is a vibrant alternative and appropriate to its probable context.

Another flamboyant addition for Carestini was 'Bianco giglio' (perhaps placed in II.ii), not least on account of its spectacular B section ('Spira un aura') in which the genteel mood of the A section (a D major allegro in 4/4) switches to a 3/8 section set in the relative minor key. During the B section the music features a plaintive oboe part sustained over tempestuous strings and continuo, and an agitated vocal part, but it does not musically illustrate the libretto's reference to an 'ever-welcome breeze' (*HHA* I/12.2 pp. 256-7). In its original context from the motet *Silete venti* this stormy music pertinently conveyed the literary reference to rising winds ('Surgant venti'), but in *Esther* it seems blown out of proportion. It is obvious that Handel wished to exploit the powerful theatrical rhetoric of the animated B section music, but it seems incongruously closer in mood to tense agitation than to the pastoral idylls and spiritual contentment necessary for this moment in *Esther*. However, the apparent paradox might have made better dramatic sense in 1737 if Annibali sang it towards the end of the oratorio. In that context the B section 'Spira un aura' could

<sup>856</sup> In *Athalia* this passage has a changed text in which the emphasis is placed on 'ciel'. Such forceful operatic emphasis over four and a half bars on 'Heaven' is less convincing than the original *Esther* text.

become a stark warning to those who, like Haman, ought to concentrate upon their duty instead of their privileges, and therefore the da capo would emphasize the triumph of the virtuous.

The E minor larghetto 'Cor fedele', added to *Esther* in 1735, lyrically conveyed a generalized sentiment of optimism using an aria that had originally alluded to 'placid calm' in *Silete venti* ('Dulcis amor'). The eloquent first vocal phrase, in counterpoint with a solo oboe, concludes with a rising sequence on 'spera sempre', echoed by strings, that is an apt musical illustration of 'always hoping' (*HHA* I/12.2 p. 301, bars 8-11). The leisurely pace and moralizing tone of 'Cor fedele' seems at odds with Carestini's character Assuerus, and appears to lack both motivation and relevance. It may support an argument that the castrato did not necessarily sing Italian additions 'in character', and it would certainly not have been so in its illogical 1737 position for Annibali (II.ii). However, Carestini originally sang the aria at the conclusion of III.i, where it functioned to mark Assuerus's entrance after the excited chorus has announced 'He comes'. 'He' in that context is literally an indication of Jehovah, and not the earthly king of the heathen Persians, but it is pertinent in so far as the arrival of Assuerus leads to the actions from which the Israelites are freed. Furthermore, the soft sentimental music of 'Cor fedele' effectively conveys Assuerus's intention to soften Esther's 'bitter pangs that are the cause of pain',<sup>857</sup> having just enjoyed his visit to her apartment at the end of Act II. Although 'Cor fedele' is not seamlessly integrated into the drama, it arguably creates a stronger impression that Assuerus is disposed to grant whatever his lover requests from him.

### Vocal adjustments

In the four works under review, there are few instances of Handel re-composing old vocal parts for new singers. It was not necessary for his various versions of *Arianna in Creta*, and the only example in the 1737 revival of *Partenope* - Ormonte's 'T'appresta forse

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<sup>857</sup> Translation of 'Cor fedele' (see Appendix 4d).



amore' – occurred in order to minimize the extent to which the vocal part doubled the continuo part when sung at alto pitch. It is not clear why Handel chose to re-compose the vocal part of 'Breathe soft ye gales' for Mrs Arne in 1740.<sup>858</sup> Before her marriage to Thomas Augustine Arne in 1737, Cecilia Young had sung the role of Israelite Woman in three revivals of *Esther*, during which 'Breathe soft ye gales' had been sung by Strada. It is not possible to establish whether Handel preferred the long arioso-like movement to be sung by the title-heroine or by the eponymous Israelite Woman from a dramatic point of view, but it seems that in 1740 his new prima donna Francesina had no strong inclination to claim the music for herself. His motivation for assigning it to Cecilia Arne in 1740 is unclear, but the re-composed vocal part suggests that Mrs Arne preferred (or required) a slightly lower *tessitura*. Cfm MU MS 251 p. 34 contains Handel's instruction that 'Watchful angels' was to be transposed down from G to F for Mrs Arne in 1740, but this is surprising because she had presumably sung this aria several times in its original key. Perhaps the range of her voice had lowered slightly since 1737. The range of the new vocal part for 'Breathe soft ye gales' is not much different from Mrs Robinson's 1732 version, except that the Mrs Arne entirely avoided singing high a'' (g'' does not appear to have been a problem for her). We cannot dismiss the possibility that Handel re-composed the voice part in 'Breathe soft ye gales' because he wanted to change it for artistic reasons. The original version maintained a high *tessitura* throughout, with the Israelite Woman's first few notes including a prominent a'': the 1740 vocal part creates a subtly different musical impression by using lower alternatives to convey a more relaxed mood that is an equally effective illustration of the text. Handel might also have intended for the re-composed version to grow gradually to a high flourish in the last phrase, thereby constructing a dramatic climax to the singer's part (the voice part remains higher throughout the movement in the 1732 version). It seems unlikely that the composer would

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<sup>858</sup> Only the revised 1740 version has been published (*HG* pp. 12-6); Chrysander was presumably uninterested in the original version or unaware of its existence. See Appendix 4e for the original 1732 version of the music.

have gone to such extensive trouble for a single performance in 1740, but it might be significant that he chose to retain this rewritten version in all his subsequent versions of the oratorio.

Rewritten vocal parts certainly made a difference to the characterization of Sisera in the 1744 versions of *Deborah*.<sup>859</sup> Without exception, each alteration for John Beard contains small details that have a significant musico-dramatic benefit. The radically rewritten recitative 'That here rebellious arms I see' (II.ii) shows that Handel made more of an effort in his 1744 revisions for Beard's role than he actually needed to.<sup>860</sup> Instead of simply transposing or adjusting the pitch of the notes, the composer went much further: the rhetorical intensity of the text's delivery was increased by transformation of the rhythms, and in several places he used the melodic line to achieve a greater declamatory impact. The tenor's music has a stronger sense of indignation in the first few words, with an emphasis on the crucial word 'arms'. The line 'Whilst our affronted mercy offers peace' uses a rising scale from f to d', with the melodic line leaning firmly into the final word, conveying that Sisera becomes more affronted as the phrase continues. The descending arpeggio on 'Bow down submissive' has an improved element of word-painting. None of these elements was evident in the original 1733a alto recitative for Bertolli. Also, Beard's re-composed vocal part has a much wider vocal range, and the prominent e flat' on 'all', followed by a falling figure on 'thy lost associates low', makes a more exaggerated dramatic effect.

The vocal part in Sisera's 'At my feet extended low' was also improved for Beard in 1744 (*HG* pp. 109-111). Bertolli's original music is not inherently dramatic, although there is some melismatic treatment of the line 'slighted mercy turns to rage', and the precocious wide leaps and cocky personality of the *tutti unisoni* orchestral writing leave us under no illusion about Sisera's arrogance. Beard's new vocal part conveys a far more assertive character. The second statement of the line 'At my feet extended low' (*HG* p.

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<sup>859</sup> The alternative alto and tenor vocal parts for the role were both printed and clearly labelled by Chrysander.

<sup>860</sup> *HG*, p. 108.



109) was changed to a rising second inversion arpeggio that reached to the top part of Beard's register (g'), and which permitted an effective drop to an octave lower on the words 'extended low'. Handel also grasped the opportunity to enhance the characterization of the villain with some vigorous word-painting that was previously lacking; this is particularly evident in his re-composition of the three and a half bars of melismatic treatment for the line 'slighted mercy turns to rage' (*HG* p. 110). Beard could have sung the 1733a original vocal line an octave lower without technical difficulty, but the 1744 coloratura illustrates the word 'rage' in a vastly different way: the tenor Sisera sings a volatile, faster, more aggressive figuration that is more harmonically interesting than the mundane rhythmic sequence of the original. The re-composed voice part is thus superior in conveying Sisera's impetuous villainy, and consolidates the antagonistic atmosphere of the confrontational scene.

Handel's successful revision of Sisera's vocal part continued in the short four-bar recitative 'Yes, how your God in wonders can excel, your low captivity demonstrates well' (*HG* p. 114). This is a less extensive re-composition because it generally follows the contour of the 1733a original part, but the rise to an e flat' on the second syllable of 'demonstrates' better conveys Sisera's sarcasm and is a more astute setting of the word than in 1733a (when the stress seems to have fallen incorrectly on the third syllable). Bertolli's former vocal part in Sisera's subsequent air 'Whilst you boast the wond'rous story' was sung an octave lower by Beard in 1744, but some small alterations had a positive impact on characterization (*HG* p. 114); in the first vocal phrase the last two notes of 'transcendent glory' were sung an octave higher, producing an unpredictable leap of a seventh that exaggerates Sisera's mockery, and the higher alternative of the last few notes ('has he freed you from our chain?') makes Sisera's question less open and more aggressively rhetorical.

The two-bar statement 'Think, O think, to your confusion' was changed to move upwards from a to d' (*HG* p. 115), transforming Sisera's warning into a dynamic arc that

flows down the entire octave instead of remaining within the narrow compass of the constrained 1733a vocal part. Seven bars later, the statement of 'your flattering hopes are vain' was also changed in 1744, with 'hopes' set to a prominent c sharp' (presumably decorated with a trill) that enhances the derogatory tension of Sisera's confrontation with the Israelites. Sisera's reiteration of 'all' in the line 'all your flatt'ring hopes are vain' (*HG* p. 116, third bar) was considerably improved by Handel's decision to move the middle 'all' up to f', which created an effect of swinging across an octave and back again, making Sisera's ranting appear less reasonable than in 1733a. It is clear from this example that it was not technically necessary for Handel to change the vocal part for Beard in 1744, but it appears that he enjoyed the opportunity to magnify Sisera's rant. A similar intention is particularly evident in the radically re-composed treatment of 'all are vain' three bars from the end of the voice part, and in the higher inversion of the final phrase that rises to top g''. It is notable that in 1744 the revised vocal part of 'Whilst you boast' concludes with increased petulance.

It is likely that in many of these instances Handel wished to prevent Beard's lowest register from clashing with the basso continuo, but the alterations are also a musico-dramatic improvement because they more successfully convey Sisera's characterization as a devious, impetuous bully. In earlier versions of the oratorio Barak's outraged response that Sisera is an 'Impious mortal' seems to be an excessive reaction, but the Canaanite captain fully deserves the rebuke in 1744 owing to Handel's exploitation of vocal attributes that Beard brought to the role. The threatening 'bad guy' persona of Sisera in 1744 was further depicted by the addition of 'Hence I hasten', an exciting vivace aria that features repeated semiquaver strings and boisterous oboes working together in four-part harmony (*HG* p. 236). The movement derived from a soprano air composed for the abandoned 1743 revival of *Athalia*, and the vocal part was again adapted to play to Beard's strengths, with higher alternatives written by Handel in pencil in M C/258 ff. 77r-78r (*HG* p. 237). The music conveys Sisera's offended response to the defiance he has encountered from his



Israelite enemies. Handel's re-composition of the vocal parts for Sisera, and the expansion of the villain's role, was without doubt the boldest and most successfully integrated element of his revisions to Part II for the 1744 performances of *Deborah*. The composer's decision to cast Beard as Sisera in all his subsequent versions suggests that he was satisfied with his revisions to the role.

## Conclusion

Although studies in Handel's opera and oratorio seasons usually focus on the newly-composed works, his programmes were largely dependent on the revival of old works. During the sixteen seasons relevant to the dissertation, between 1729 and 1757, Handel gave 51 performances of pasticcios, 180 performances of new works, and 258 performances of revivals.<sup>861</sup> According to these statistics, 52.8% of Handel's career was devoted to performing old compositions. The dissertation is the first attempt to investigate thoroughly the main activity of a composer who still attracts widespread fascination and affection from modern performers, scholars and audiences.

It is clear from an analysis of Handel's programming of seasons that the composer's choice of works was not haphazard or thoughtlessly improvised. His assertive move towards artistic semi-independence in 1729 enabled him to pursue a direction of greater freedom in his choice of music drama genres. The development of English oratorio for unstaged theatre performances from 1732 onwards was only one part of this overall strategy. Even after he ceased producing Italian operas in London after 1741, the basic concept of variety of dramatic types within coherent seasonal planning remained an important aspect of his career as composer and performer.

The dissertation offers a considerable amount of new information about the composer's artistic and practical choices that are evident in his successive presentations of *Partenope*, *Arianna in Creta*, *Esther* (1732) and *Deborah*, advancing our knowledge of how Handel revised these four works, offering new information that corrects previous attempts to ascertain how and why the composer changed his music, and providing a view of their musico-dramatic characteristics that is unencumbered by generalised assumptions.

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<sup>861</sup> Including the concert series at Oxford in July 1733 and annual performances of *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital in the 1750s.



Handel made advantageous revisions to all of the works discussed. The original 1730a version of *Partenope* has the strongest and most coherent musico-dramatic text, but the opera was enhanced by the addition of the sinfonia inserted before the *scena ultima* (1730b) and Armindo's 'Bramo restar' (added to I.vii in 1737). The 1734a first-performance version of *Arianna in Creta* is an effective opera, but the exaggerated key relationships between arias evident in the 1733 first draft version were undermined by some of the transpositions for Carestini, and the autograph also presented a more convincing scheme of II.x (with Teseo singing 'Salda quercia' instead of 'Al fine amore'). The opera was improved in 1734b by the abridgement of Carilda's 'Dille che nel mio seno' (I.iii), and perhaps by the addition of ballets.

The title-heroine in *Esther* was more convincingly characterized in the 1733a version of the oratorio, and she also benefited in 1742 from the omission of her 'Alleluia' (I.i). However, it is a pity from a musical point of view that Handel never restored the full da capo Cannons version of 'Praise the Lord with chearful noise' (I.iv). Several revisions, such as the Italian additions for Carestini (1735) and 'Sion now her head shall raise' (1757), were not perfectly integrated into the dramatic structure, but they are outstanding musical compositions.<sup>862</sup> Moreover, *Deborah* was not an artistic failure, but a novelty. It seems that the oratorio might not have been dramatically conceived, but that the composer intended it as a leisurely-paced grand entertainment, possibly even with visual enhancements that we cannot now envisage. However, quicker dramatic pace was a benefit of the 1733b Oxford version, the 1744a tenor version of Sisera's role during Part II presents a much more impressive villain, and the 1744b scheme of movements for Part III certainly improve the oratorio's last scenes.

Of course, some revisions were less successful and dramatically coherent than others. However, the fact that Handel could improve his own work or produce alternatives

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<sup>862</sup> It is paradoxical that Carestini's Italian additions for *Esther* are unfairly neglected by modern performers as concert arias, whereas the motet *Silere venti* - from which several of the additions were taken - was never performed by Handel in public but is now a popular concert piece that has at least half a dozen commercial recordings.

of equal musico-dramatic validity has been firmly established in studies devoted to his compositional process and first performances of music theatre works.<sup>863</sup> Convincing arguments have been frequently made that when he modified his first compositional draft to incorporate new ideas, or abandon superfluous ones, the work concerned usually benefited from increased dramatic integrity. I do not seek either to disprove or support the popular theory that Handel's first performance versions are usually more refined music dramas than other authentic versions, but there is clearly an artistic validity in many of the revisions found in the composer's earlier compositional drafts and later revivals. The existence of many of these changes has been documented by previous scholars, but the artistic validity of them has seldom been recognized or discussed.<sup>864</sup>

The most essential conclusion that we can draw from a study of changes made to these four works across twenty-seven years is that the assumption that Handel invariably ruined his own works in revivals cannot be supported. Winton Dean produced magnificent work on Handel's operas and oratorios that remains indispensable to Handelian audiences, performers and scholars in the twenty-first century, combining scholarly research with critical judgments. However, it should no longer be unquestioningly accepted that the composer's cuts were 'perverse and even ruinous to the fabric', that insertions were 'always irrelevant and often otiose', or that 'there was something in his character conducive to drift. He was sometimes content with shoddy work; [and] showed a tendency ... to perpetuate the most nonsensical travesties of his earlier masterpieces'.<sup>865</sup> In 1959,

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<sup>863</sup> See Dean & Knapp for discussion about *Giulio Cesare*, and Terence Best's *IIIA* preface to *Tamerlano*. Handel's autograph manuscripts and conducting scores for both operas all illustrate that he went to considerable trouble to refine characterization and enhance the dramatic impact of his operas after they were substantially completed in first draft.

<sup>864</sup> Such arguments are rare, but there are some notable examples. Terence Best, in the preface to his edition of *Radamisto* (second version, *IIIA* II/9.2), argued that revisions made for the revival in December 1720 improved the opera, and Suzana Ograjensek has recently challenged the view that Handel wrecked the opera when he revised it for Cuzzoni and Faustina in 1728 (Op. cit., p. 338). Graham Cummings suggested that the Handel's revisions to *Poro* for its revival in November 1731 strengthened the drama (Op. cit., pp. 438-40).

<sup>865</sup> Dean: *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, pp. 35, 91, 92.



Dean condemned Handel's treatment of revivals as casual, if not worse, but observed that 'This question has never been studied in full'.<sup>866</sup>

This question has formed the starting-point for the present study of four works, and the dissertation challenges the assumption that Handel usually ruined operas and oratorios in his revivals. It also demonstrates that revisions were seldom casual (and very rarely worse), and offers arguments that alterations were rarely inexplicable. It is undeniable that some of Handel's revisions damaged the dramatic coherence and quality of his works, but many other changes were arguably improvements, and plenty of revisions can be viewed as alternative options of equal validity.

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<sup>866</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

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#### **a) Collected editions**

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edited by Friedrich W. Chrysander and Max Seiffert (Leipzig and Bergedorf bei Hamburg,  
1858-94, 1902).**

***HHA*     *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe im Auftrage der Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft*  
Series I-V and suppl. (Leipzig and Kassel, 1955 - ).  
The new critical edition of Handel's works, currently in progress. The four works  
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#### **b) Separate editions of Handel's works referred to in the text**

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[See Appendix 6 for a full list of printed editions of music referred to in this thesis]

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